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By  
DICK DONOVAN



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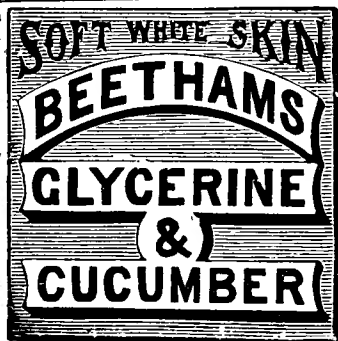
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BY

DICK DONOVAN

AUTHOR OF

"THE MAN FROM MANCHESTER," "A DETECTIVE'S TRIUMPHS,"  
"DARK DEEDS," "CAUGHT AT LAST!" ETC.



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# RIDDLES READ.

## *IN THE SHADOW OF SUDDEN DEATH.*

IN the days of my youth I was a student in Paris, and had the good fortune to be well acquainted with Monsieur Eugène Fourbert, the chief superintendent of the Paris police. He was in many respects a very remarkable man. Possessed of extraordinary acumen, combined with a critical power of analysis and logical deduction that seldom erred, he became a terror to evil-doers, and a tremendous force on the side of order. He was a descendant of an old French family who had all more or less distinguished themselves. Eugène had commenced life in the Army, and saw much service; but being seriously wounded was forced to retire. Having friends at court, he received an appointment as chief of a division of police. In that capacity he displayed so much aptitude, so much natural ability for the work, that he very speedily made his mark, and ultimately rose to be supreme head of the army of police, which is somewhat differently ordered and controlled to what its English equivalent is; and in my opinion the French system is infinitely better. This remark particularly applies to what I may term the

Detective arm of the service. In France it seems to have been brought almost to perfection, for the principle that is ever prominently kept in view is this: Crime is in effect a guerilla warfare against well-conducted society and the forces of law and order. Crime endeavours to shelter itself by the exercise of deep cunning, and since crime is unlawful, any means that may be taken to circumvent it are right. Hence the reason of that remarkable system of espionage which obtains in France. The proportion of undetected crime amongst our neighbours is at least thirty per cent. less than it is with us. Espionage is an absolutely untranslatable word, for it means so much that is not expressed by the English equivalent "spying." If a man once brings himself within cognisance of the French law it is absolutely certain he will never be lost sight of so long as he remains within the sphere of French influence. And even if he goes away and returns after many years, his record has been so well kept that sooner or later he is sure to be recognized, for one of the many argus eyes of the system will fix him. In England a policeman who may chance to arrest a man on suspicion of his being guilty of some crime is not allowed to question him. In France it is precisely the reverse. There it is an article of faith that a man who is suddenly taken hold of by the law is far more likely to betray himself by some chance admission wrung from him in the moment of his confusion and fright, than he is after he has had time to cool down and collect his senses. All this, however, may seem a digression, but I could not avoid it in speaking of my friend and mentor Monsieur Fourbert, while the story I have to tell is so full of dramatic glamour, that the practical remarks with which it begins are justified.

Fourbert was pleased to take great interest in me, and need I say that his methods and manner fascinated me? He had a face of such extreme mobility, that I doubt if I have ever seen any one who equalled him, let alone excelled him. His habitual expression was one of stern thoughtfulness, but in an instant he could so change his features that, given a corresponding change of dress, he might have defied the recognition of his most intimate friend. This power was that of course of the born actor, and Fourbert being conscious of its possession had taken the most laborious means to cultivate it, until he had brought it to such a state of perfection that it was little short of marvellous. Apart from that he had the faculty of organization largely developed, and he knew how to select the right man for the right place. Nor did he hesitate for a single moment, when he deemed it necessary, to personally attempt to unravel any problem that happened to be more than ordinarily intricate. The case I am about to relate is one in which he matched his own splendid skill against the altogether superior cunning of a desperate criminal, with what result the reader will gather later on. In this instance I am simply the narrator of a drama in which I played the part of an onlooker, a close student of Monsieur Fourbert's method, and I had the advantage of being allowed to follow as his shadow.

At the period I am dealing with, that notorious but classical region of Parisian Bohemia, the Latin Quarter, still retained much of its ancient appearance in the tall ramshackle houses, and narrow dirty streets. In the very heart of the Quarter, nearly, there was situated a dark, squalid passage known as the Rue du Chat Noir—that is, the street of the Black Cat. Why it was so



named I cannot tell. Why it was called a *street* at all is not easy to understand, for it was nothing more than a short alley connecting two parallel thoroughfares that bore a far from enviable reputation. The Rue du Chat Noir was a plague-spot, on each side was about a dozen of some of the oldest houses in Paris. They were let out as tenements, and were simply hiding-places for human rats—human vermin of a most obnoxious kind. Had it been possible and allowable to have put a huge extinguisher over the whole block of buildings comprised in the Rue du Chat Noir during the daytime, when all the vermin were slinking away from the light of day, and then have lighted underneath the extinguisher a few tons of sulphur, the world would have been well rid of a colony of evil, and Paris would have been cleansed of one pest-hole. But that could not be, and so the devil in the shape of man and woman located himself there and practically defied the authorities. It was, to use an expressive term, the spawning ground of all that was obnoxious in human nature.

In the dawn of a spring morning two garde de la paix were making their way through the notorious Rue, when they stumbled on something huddled in a heap in the mid kennel. It proved to be the body of a woman, not the first dead woman who had been found there, but speedily it was made manifest that this one could not have been a denizen of that inferno. She was well, if not handsomely, dressed: all her clothing was of the best, her underlinen of unusually fine texture. Her hands were white and unsoiled—the hands of a lady; and her face was patrician in its refinement and classical outlines. Her hair was rich, well kept, and golden in hue.

She had received injury sufficient to have destroyed a dozen lives had she possessed them. The skull was

fractured, the neck was broken, some of the ribs were crushed in. But these were all inflicted after *death*, and were the result of a fall from a height. Death was due to a stiletto stab which had gone right through the heart. The blow had been dealt with terrific force; the stiletto must have been unusually long, for its point had projected under the shoulder-blade where there was a puncture corresponding to the one in front. Death must necessarily have come with merciful swiftness, and while the dainty body was still warm, ruffian hands had flung it into the kennel, where, crushed and mangled, the silver light of the spring dawn revealed it. The pockets of the clothing were empty, and on the clothing itself there was no sign or mark that would have served as a clue. Indents on the fingers told that she had worn rings, but they had been stripped off, and an earring had been so forcibly torn from one of her ears that the lobe was split. In age she could not have been more than thirty-two or three. There were indications that she had been a mother, and had she lived for three or four months longer she would again have experienced the pangs of maternity.

It was a case of murder, of murder most brutal, most revolting. It might almost be described as double murder, for the unborn life had been extinguished too.

For days the remains of this beautiful creature, fashioned in God's own image, and brutally slain by her own kind, lay exposed in the Morgue, ghastly and silent, yet eloquent in that stony stillness of a brutal wrong, a cruel fate. Crowds flocked to the place and stared half fascinated through the plate glass partitions at the decaying remnants of mortality stretched on the marble slab over which trickled a stream of ice-cold water. But of the many hundreds of curious and

morbid sight-seers who passed through that chamber of death, no one came forward to claim the body, therefore did it seem as if she was a stranger in that civilized land. During the many days that the still figure lay there with the sightless eyes staring blankly upward as if in mute appeal to heaven for vengeance on her slayer, steps had been taken by the police to solve the mystery and discover her murderer, but all without avail. The ghastly secret of the Rue du Chat Noir was well kept, and some of the best talent of Paris was baffled. Monsieur le Chef Fourbert was distressed and annoyed. He recognized that this was a crime somewhat out of the ordinary. There was deductive evidence that the murdered woman was not a denizen of that pestilential Alsatia. She must have moved in a very different social station to the rats of the Chat Noir. Therefore the mystery was the greater, and around the crime was a certain glamour of romance. Amongst Fourbert's staff was a man named Roget—a fellow who had been a convict and had given the police much trouble. Ultimately he had offered his services to the police, and his intimate knowledge of criminal ways and life had procured him admission into the secret service, and he had been the means of bringing many a hardened ruffian to his doom.

Roget was an evil-looking fellow, with a round, bullet-shaped head, his hair closely cropped, his face clean shaved. He had strongly marked features, a coarse cruel mouth, a square heavy chin, and small twinkling eyes that glittered with snake-like brightness. He was built on massive lines. His limbs were ponderous, his muscles like steel cords. When once he got a fair grip on an opponent, the opponent had little chance. Roget had been known to grip a man's wrists so hard

that he had broken the wrists simply with the pressure of his great fingers. Amongst the police he was known by the sobriquet of "The Bull-dog," and he was said to possess all a bull-dog's ferocity. His life had been many times attempted by his former associates, but though scarred and hacked, he had escaped serious injury.

One morning, a fortnight after the murder, when it seemed as if the crime was destined to go unavenged, Monsieur Fourbert summoned Roget to his private cabinet, and he accorded me the privilege of being present during the interview. The only other person in the room was a shorthand clerk, concealed behind a screen.

I saw Roget for the first time that morning. He was a repulsive-looking fellow, his massive frame suggestive of enormous strength, as was his whole manner, while his facial expression particularly, and glittering eyes, were suggestive of latent ferocity. Round his neck was twisted carelessly a frayed and faded red handkerchief: he wore a blue blouse, wide baggy linen trousers, and sabots. He looked hard and inquiringly at me as he entered the cabinet and made his obeisance to the chief.

"Have you any report to make, Roget?" asked Monsieur Fourbert.

"None, monsieur," was the curt, gruff answer.

"Is the mystery of the Rue du Chat Noir to go unsolved?" said Fourbert, with an emphasized point on every word.

"I have done my best," growled Roget.

"And failed?"

"And failed, monsieur le chef, as you say."

"But you have haunted the dens of the Rue du Chat Noir?"

"I have."

"And mixed with the vermin as one of them?"

"I have."

"Still you have failed to get sign or sound that would help us?"

"Sorrowfully I confess that is so, monsieur le chef."

"Umph! It is strange," murmured Fourbert, reflectively. Then he added with an obvious meaning concealed in his remarks, "And yet this woman was stabbed to death and flung from a window in the Rue du Chat Noir. She was not one of the rats: she did not belong to the place, she must have been lured there; possibly for the mere purpose of robbery; *probably* for some deeper and more sinister reason. The lure that led that lady into the death trap must have been a strong and unusual one. Do you not think so?"

"I do, Monsieur Fourbert."

"Nevertheless you, with your trained instincts, and your intimate knowledge of the ways of human beasts of prey, have failed to detect a single sign?"

"Again I repeat with sorrow, monsieur, that is quite correct."

"Then it seems highly probable the murderer will go unpunished since *you* have failed to track him down?"

"I am afraid that will be the case," answered Roget, with a sigh.

"So be it. It is regrettable, but one cannot do that which is impossible. You may go."

Roget bowed and retired. The instant the door had closed Monsieur Fourbert struck his bell. An attendant entered.

"Just call Roget back; I have forgotten something."

In another minute the Bull-dog stood in the chief's presence again.

"By the way, I have forgotten to say, Roget, that I want you on a special service to-night."

"Good, monsieur. At what hour?"

"Midnight."

"At what place?"

"The Morgue."

"The Morgue, monsieur!"

"Yes. You are not afraid of the Morgue, are you?"

"Oh dear no," exclaimed Roget with a strange laugh.

"But will monsieur be there?"

"Without doubt. Otherwise how can I meet you there?"

"True, monsieur. And yet it is an unusual rendez-vous, is it not?"

"Well—yes. But I have an object. It may help us. Your assistance is necessary."

Roget bowed low.

"I am monsieur's obedient servant."

"And a faithful servant, whose reward will come."

Roget bowed again and smiled. "You can go now. Remember; midnight at the Morgue." When we were once again alone, my friend turned to me and remarked, "This is a strange case, a little complicated, somewhat romantic."

"It is," I answered; "and there does not seem much chance of the criminal being discovered."

"At present it does *seem* as if that would be the case. But I am not without hope. We may succeed ultimately. By the way, would you care to go to the Morgue to-night?"

"I shouldn't at all object," I answered.

"Very well. Present that, and you will gain admission. Till then au revoir."

He handed me a strip of paper bearing the official

stamp in one corner, and on which he had written, *Admit the bearer, Fourbert*. Naturally I was curious to know what his object was in going to the Morgue, and why he had appointed that ghastly place as a rendezvous. It would have been impertinence for me to have questioned him. His methods were his own, and I was highly privileged in being taken into his confidence so far. Therefore I was content to watch and say nothing. But I knew that there was little he did that had not some well-thought-out design or method in it, consequently I could not regard his arrangements for that night as a mere freak.

The clocks had scarcely done chiming the hour of midnight, when I tapped on the door of the concierge's lodge at the Morgue. In a few minutes the door was opened, and the keeper admitted me, after he had examined my pass, and I was conducted into an inner room, where I found an official whom I recognized, as I had often seen him at the bureau of police. He greeted me, and in answer to a question I put to him, he said the chief had not yet arrived.

"Ah, mayhap that is his knock," he exclaimed, as a knock sounded on the door. But when the concierge returned he ushered in Roget, not the chief.

"Has Monsieur Fourbert arrived?" asked Roget.

"No," answered the official; "but he is sure to be here soon. In the mean time come this way." He motioned to me to follow also, and he led us along a passage, through a doorway, then along another passage, and opening a door, we passed into the Morgue. There was a strange odour, a dreadful silence broken only by the trickling of the water, that somehow made the silence more intense. A lighted lamp was suspended from the vaulted ceiling, and as it swayed

backwards and forwards in the draughts of air that entered by the ventilators, it called into being ghostly shadows, that, having regard to the place and its associations, produced in me a creepy sensation. Three of the slabs were occupied, but two were entirely concealed by being covered over with sheets. On the third all exposed was the marble-like figure of the murdered lady. The head had been propped up, so that the face was brought more into prominence. Standing by the side of the corpse was a priest. He wore a long cloak with a cowl that almost entirely concealed his face. He was motionless. His hands were crossed upon his breast, against which he pressed a crucifix. He seemed so absorbed in his meditations or prayer that our entrance did not disturb him.

"It is one of the holy fathers of the city who flit about at night administering comfort to those who will accept," whispered our guide. "He craved to be admitted a little while ago, in order that he might look upon the poor dead woman, and pray for her soul. He will depart in a few minutes."

The priest now recognized our presence, and as he kissed his crucifix and raised it aloft, he said solemnly—

"Peace be with you, my sons; I have been meditating and musing in this place of the dead. Murmur a prayer with me for the soul of this poor creature, murdered in her prime, and while her beauty was yet unfaded."

The official crossed himself, and knelt by the slab. I stood with my hands folded, and deeply impressed by the strange and solemn scene. But Roget drew back into a corner, and addressing him the holy father said—

"Why draw away, my son? The dead cannot injure



you. And surely you will not refuse to say a prayer for the good of her soul. Give me your hand."

Sullenly, and as it seemed to me very reluctantly, Roget approached the slab and offered his hand to the priest, who, taking it, placed it on the cold, wet hand of the dead woman. Roget uttered a suppressed cry, and shrank away, muttering—

"Ugh! I like not the touch of a corpse."

The priest made no reply, but mumbling a few words of a collect from the Roman Catholic liturgy for the repose of the souls of the departed, and then making the sign of the cross on his breast, he seemed as it were to glide out of the place, and disappear.

"What a life of self-abnegation those men lead!" remarked the official reflectively, as the priest went out.

"Pooh!" said Roget irritably, "it is all humbug, mere business. They poke their noses in where they have no right to be. What did that fellow want to intrude here for? He had no right to be admitted. We are here for practical purposes, not for mummery."

"Well, I don't know that he has done any harm," answered the official, with a reprimand in his manner and tone. "Anyway, he was quite privileged to be here if it pleased him, and a few moments of solemn reflection in a place like this is good for one."

"Ugh! I wish the chief would come," said Roget, with a shudder and an impatient shrug of the shoulders. "I don't like this place; it's gruesome enough at the best of times; at this hour it makes one's flesh creep."

"We need not wait here," answered the official. "We can go into the concierge's room."

As he spoke he led the way out, and Roget was nothing loth to follow. For my own part, I confess I was glad enough too to get away. It was not

pleasant to be there with those decaying remains of mortality lying on the wet slabs, and the air heavy and foetid with the strange, indescribable smell.

The concierge produced some cognac, which was doubly acceptable under the circumstances. Roget drank an undue proportion of it, then rolled a cigarette and began to smoke, we following suit. The aroma of the tobacco was refreshing and pleasant after the odour of the Morgue. We waited until one o'clock boomed out from the church clocks, solemn and slow, then at the suggestion of the official we prepared to go.

"Something unlooked for must have detained the chief," he said. "It is very seldom he fails to keep an appointment. It is not likely that he will come now, so we had better say good-night."

We parted, each going his respective way, and during the whole of that night the marble face of the murdered woman, with its blank eyes staring up to the heavens, haunted me. I suppose I was more impressionable at that time. I did not see Monsieur Fourbert again for two days.

"I disappointed you the other night," he said. "But you see I am a creature of circumstances, and subject to the exigencies of my position. However, it was not wasted time with you, perhaps."

"No, I don't think it was," I answered.

"You are an observant man?" he asked, as he fixed his strangely penetrating eyes upon me, until I felt as if he were reading my very thoughts.

"I hope I am," I said.

"We shall see," he remarked, with a smile, as he turned to sign some official documents. And then, as he had important engagements to fulfil, I took my leave of him.

A few days later I was summoned to London to attend the death-bed of a dear sister, and was not able to get back to Paris until three months had passed away. In the course of a day or two I called upon my friend Monsieur Fourbert. I found him as usual up to the eyes in business. Nevertheless, he received me with the urbanity and courtesy which were so characteristic of him, and he managed to give me half an hour of his valuable time, during which we talked of many things. And at last he said—

“Oh, by the way, I think you were somewhat interested in the murder in the Rue du Chat Noir. You remember it, of course. It occurred when you were last in Paris.”

“Ah, yes, I was going to ask you about that. Was the murderer ever discovered?”

“He has not yet been brought to justice,” replied Fourbert, evasively, as it seemed to me.

“Which means, I suppose, that he is not likely to be?”

“That is a somewhat hasty conclusion to come to, Monsieur Donovan,” he answered, as he stroked his face with his hand, after his habit when he was thoughtful and reflective; then, as he puffed the smoke from his cigarette and watched it curl ceilingward, he added, his eyes still fixed on the smoke, “You know a lucky star has shone above me since I have been in office, and not a single case of importance has been passed to the category of undetected crimes.”

“I assume, then, that you know the plot of the drama of the Rue du Chat Noir?”

“To—some—extent—I—do,” he answered, pausing between each word, and seemingly still much interested in the gyrations of his cigarette smoke.

"Then do I gather that you have discovered the perpetrator of the tragedy?"

"I didn't quite say that. But I *think*, though I am not *quite* sure, that I am on his track."

He looked at me now, with his dark eyes glittering with a light which I did not quite understand then. Much as I was wishful to prolong the conversation, I did not attempt to do so, for many of his subordinates were waiting to see him, and he had a great deal of official business to transact. So I rose to go, and as he held my hand in his he said—

"By the way, the day after to-morrow, in the morning at dawn, a notorious ruffian is to be guillotined—one Pascal Flammarion, who did a whole family to death at Neuilly for the sake of a few francs. Would you care to attend the execution?" I hesitated what to answer, which caused him to exclaim, "Oh, of course, please yourself; but I shall be there, and I hope to discover the murderer of the lady who was found in the Rue du Chat Noir."

I hesitated no longer. There was something in his manner that struck me, I felt sure he had an object in asking me, so I signified my wish to accompany him, whereupon he at once wrote me out an official order, and instructed his clerk to see it properly attested and stamped. As he held it out to me, he said—

"We shall meet in the prison of La Roquette; that will enable you to pass the barriers, and gain you admission. Don't be later than two o'clock in the morning. Au revoir." He extended his hand to me, and I took my departure, wondering what new development was about to take place, and why he wished me to be present at Flammarion's execution. I was certain

that he had something in reserve, and knowing the man so well, I had no doubt that that something would be interesting.

The morning of the execution came. It was still dark as I made my way to the gloomy prison of La Roquette. A few hours previously a terrific thunderstorm had broken over Paris, and the rain had descended in torrents. The air therefore was fresh and cool, and owing to the rain there were far fewer people in the square than is usual on such occasions. But still there was a great crowd of brutal, jeering, half-drunken loafers of both sexes, who made the night hideous with their ribald songs and coarse jests. With some little difficulty I pushed through to the jail, and was duly admitted into its silent and sombre corridors. I noticed as I passed through the square, the instrument of death silhouetted against the night sky. "Monsieur de Paris" and his assistants had completed their preparations for the coming ceremony, and in another hour or so the last act of the ghastly drama would be consummated.

The silence and solemnity of the prison were particularly striking after the hideous roar of the human scum in the square outside. I was shown into a small anteroom, and in about half an hour Monsieur Fourbert came to me. He looked pale and haggard, and sank into a chair with a weary sigh.

"This battling with crime is a terrible business," he murmured. "We who fight on the side of law see sad sights, and, contrary to the general belief, I do not think we can ever become callous; for no man of right feeling and good principles can ever contemplate unmoved the fiendish wickedness of men created in God's own image. But wickedness must be punished,

and it is God's edict that blood shall be punished with blood. For the last two months I have had an anxious time of it. The crime of the Rue du Chat Noir has troubled me. I was determined to unravel that mystery, and this morning will prove whether I have followed the right trail or not."

I had never heard him talk in such a way before; and very rarely indeed did he moralize, although he was a man full of deep feeling and sentiment, and a more tender-hearted man it would have been difficult to have found. As I saw he was in a very thoughtful mood, I did not care to worry him with questions or conversations. He ceased to speak, and closing his eyes appeared to doze. Presently he sprang up, and, going to the window, flung it open, and drew in a great gulp of the fresh air. In the eastern sky was the first faint glimmering of dawn, and high above the wind that moaned through the trees, rose the roar of the expectant crowd who were anxious for the show to begin. As he turned from the window with a sigh, he said—

"We stand now in the shadow of sudden death; and a revelation is about to take place." At that moment a bell tolled, its sounds shivering on the air. "Come," he said. "They arouse him from his last earthly sleep that he may pass into the sleep that is eternal."

I followed him into the corridor, and we made our way to a large room where a number of official gentlemen were assembled. In a corner, looking sullen and brutish as he usually did, was Jacques Roget.

The dawn broke. A grey light stole over the sky, and then there came in the pink flush of the summer morn. A few moments later the door opened, and the governor of the jail entered. Making a respectful salute, he said—

"Gentlemen, all is ready."

Fourbert turned to me and whispered—

"Keep close behind me."

Then I noted that he beckoned to Roget to follow him, and we all went out into a vestibule, where, surrounded with armed warders, was the man who was to die, Flammarion! a huge, savage-looking wretch, whose face was like a corpse, while beads of perspiration rolled down his cheeks. His fierce eyes turned from one to another of the men present with a look of awful despair. He was bound and helpless, and breathed as if he was suffering physical agony. The procession was formed. A priest bearing a crucifix, and muttering the prayers for the dying, preceded the prisoner, and then bare-headed the rest of the assembly followed. An iron door was presently flung open, and the morning air came in with a sweep. The crowd in the square were hushed now to silence, for the supreme moment was at hand. We passed along an avenue of gendarmes, to where the awful instrument of death loomed over the prisoner, who started and reeled and had to be helped up the steps. I saw him seized by the executioner and his assistant. There was a momentary struggle, as if the human brute in the agony of despair thought that it was still possible to make a dash for liberty. But he was flung on to the plank roughly, and his neck was thrust through the lunette. Then there was a glittering flash, a hiss of steel, and——

"Jacques Roget, here in the shadow of sudden death, I charge you with the murder of Madame Mousson in the Rue du Chat Noir."

These words, spoken low, but distinctly, fell upon my ear, and turning from the fascination of the flashing

steel, I beheld Monsieur Fourbert with his hand on Roget's shoulder, while that wretch looked horrible in his ghastliness as he cringed and shrank from his accuser. At the instant, the tragedy being over, the mob broke into a roar and yell which drowned all other sounds. The police and the soldiers began to push the surging crowd back, so as to clear the square, and I saw Roget being marched away in the grip of two stalwart gendarmes.

When the evening had come I sat with Monsieur Fourbert in his study at his private residence; and he told me the following story:

"Before the crime in the Rue du Chat Noir, I had reason to suspect the fidelity of Jacques Roget. You are aware that he is a man of a very low type, and had been a criminal before he was employed in the secret service. I happen to know that he was in the habit of frequenting the Rue du Chat Noir, for purposes unconnected with his duties, and that in the top story of one of the old houses lived a female cousin of his, Marie Blanc, a woman with a very bad record indeed."

"How did you find that out?" I asked.

"An old man, ostensibly a rag-picker, hungry, wolfish, desperate, and an outcast, was in the habit of haunting the place. He got to know the wretches who lived there. He spoke their argot, he learned a good deal about them; he saw Roget come and go."

"Was that rag-picker one of your spies?"

"That rag-picker was myself."

"Yourself, Monsieur Fourbert!"

"Yes, I ascertained that on the night of the crime Roget was at his cousin's with a well-dressed woman, who was a stranger to the neighbourhood. A little later that woman was found dead in the kennel of



the court. Still I had no direct evidence that Roget was responsible for her death. Men of his stamp are strangely superstitious, and so I made a rendezvous at the Morgue, wishing to test his nerves and self-command in the presence of the victim. A priest stood over the body, as you know, and he asked Roget to pray for the soul of the dead woman as he placed his hand on hers. But the villain shrank away appalled, and his terror and confusion added another link to the chain."

"Then you were the priest," I said, growing more astounded as he proceeded with his narrative.

"Yes. But beyond these manifestations of craven fear on Roget's part, which might or might not be the effects of a guilty conscience, I had no justification for my suspicions. I felt that the next important step was to find out who the woman was. There were many things that tended to confirm me in my belief that she was not French; my opinion was, and that opinion was shared by my colleagues, that she was English. I therefore caused her photograph to be sent over to London, with a request that it would be freely exposed. This was done, a copy was posted at every police-station throughout the kingdom, with the result that she was identified as a Madame Mousson, an English woman, but married to a Frenchman, and she had lived with her husband in Liverpool. She was a lady delicately nurtured and brought up. He, an adventurer, and worthless scoundrel. She led a dreadful life with him. The money she possessed he robbed her of, then he stole her clothes and jewellery and deserted her. She got to know that he was in Paris, and followed him. Wishing to get rid of her, I have no doubt he employed Roget to help him. And now that I have

Roget in custody I may get confirmation of my suspicions, for by this time Marie Blanc is in prison, and when the two come to be suddenly confronted and interrogated according to our French system, we may learn some startling truths."

This view of Monsieur Fourbert's was amply confirmed. The two wretches when brought together, and subjected to severe judicial questioning, on the part of the examining judge, contradicted each other, got mixed up, made one statement one moment to contradict it the next. Then the infamous woman, fearing for the safety of her own neck, bluntly accused Roget of having committed the crime.

In the end it was proved that Roget made the acquaintance of Mousson in the Jardin Mabille; they became intimate. Mousson had money, and ultimately, no doubt recognizing the criminal instincts and pliability of Roget, he tempted him to commit the crime, for the unfortunate Madame Mousson had followed her husband to Paris, and found him out. She was at length lured to the Rue du Chat Noir by Roget, who induced her to believe she would meet her husband, who was living there with another woman. Madame Mousson was a stranger to Paris, and so readily fell a victim to the snare set for her, as she had no knowledge of the infamous locality she was going to.

Such was the story that was gradually unfolded in the courts of law, thanks to the extraordinary power and talent of Monsieur Fourbert. The end was, Roget expiated his crime on the scaffold, while Marie Blanc was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment as an accessory to the crime. Mousson unfortunately escaped, and what became of him was never known.

## *THE DOOM OF THE STAR-GAZER.*

IT is a good many years ago since the case I am about to record caused a sensation in London that has scarcely been equalled since. People who can no longer be considered middle aged will no doubt remember it well, but to the generation that has sprung up since then, it will be fresh, and, as I venture to think, not without considerable interest.

Not only did the position of the parties concerned in the matter raise it above the level of the commonplace, but all the elements of the tragic drama were replete with the mystery, sensationalism, and even weirdness, so beloved of the general public.

It was one of the early cases I was called upon to investigate. I was a young man at the time, and full of zeal and enthusiasm. I had but a short time previously contributed to one of the leading Magazines, an article under the heading of "The Rationale of the Detective's Art."

I was modest enough to withhold my name from that article, and blushed one morning to find that the views I had anonymously expressed, had brought me a certain amount of fame. There was a consensus of opinion amongst the reviewers that my paper was full of "sound logical reasoning, and evidently the

emanation of a mind capable of working out the theory of detection with something like the precision of a mathematical problem."

This, of course, was high praise, but it was somewhat qualified by the statement that while in theory my line of argument as to how crime should be brought home was admirable, it was hardly capable of being practically worked out. This somewhat put me on my mettle, because I had aimed at demonstrating that most people who attempted to unravel mysteries failed for the simple reason that they did not give sufficient attention to the "*minutiæ*"—if I may so express it—of a case; and they were unwilling to recognize what I had humbly ventured to enforce as an apothegm, that "the seemingly impossible in all mysteries is often the most highly probable."

I had always been fond of looking upon this as a sort of Golden Text that no detective could afford to ignore. But, as a matter of fact, it was almost universally ignored, save by those men who, with in-born artistic feeling, elevated the detective's calling to a fine art. Now, when the case, which forms the subject of my story, occurred, it afforded me the very opportunity wished for, which was to give practical illustration of the theory I had set forth in "*The Rationale of the Detective's Art.*"

I need scarcely say, perhaps, that a little more than a quarter of a century ago, Hammersmith, now a teeming and populous neighbourhood, was a wilderness of market gardens and waste land. It still retained some aspects of a rural district, and there were even streams of water where watercress could be gathered. Such houses as existed were, with some exceptions, for the most part old-fashioned residences,

and one, at least, had been in existence since the first half of the seventeenth century.

Who had originally built it; who had been its tenants, and what it had been called previous to the time that I am dealing with, I know not; but when I became acquainted with it, it was known as "The Observatory," and it had long been in the occupation of a retired military officer, named Arthur Patchford Hulton, known generally in the neighbourhood as Colonel Hulton.

He had seen considerable service in the Crimea, during which he had been twice severely wounded, and in consequence, was compelled to quit the service. He retired on a good pension, which, together with some private means, placed him in very comfortable circumstances. He had two hobbies, gardening and astronomy, in both of which, as an amateur, he excelled.

He had purchased the house I allude to at Hammersmith, as it afforded him the opportunity of indulging in both of his favourite pursuits. The house stood in a little more than an acre of ground, which was laid out with great taste and judgment; and the colonel was proud of his garden, as, indeed, he had every reason to be. At the top of the house he had fitted up a small observatory, where he often spent many hours of the night, when the sky and atmosphere were favourable for astronomical observations. I shall have occasion to speak more in detail of this observatory later on.

In order to add interest to what follows, and make it more intelligible, I must give a few particulars of the colonel's domestic affairs as they existed at the time I was called upon to investigate his tragic

fate. He had been married a great many years, but his wife did not live with him. Not that there was any serious disagreement between them, so far as I ever gathered; but it appeared that the lady did not like the seclusion of, as she termed it, "the outlandish neighbourhood of Hammersmith," and so she elected to reside in the heart of the metropolis, and occupied a house in Russell Square.

There she resided, with two grown-up sons and a daughter. The colonel's favourite daughter was Lydia, and she spent the greater part of her time with him at "The Observatory." His household then consisted of Lydia, who was about twenty years of age; a housekeeper, a middle-aged woman named Anna Starkie; a servant-of-all-work, and a parlour-maid; and Mrs. Starkie's husband, John, who helped his master in the garden, and looked after his horse.

The colonel was an unostentatious man, but was fond of comfort, and not averse even to a little luxury. He had a strong dislike, however, to any great exertion. Beyond his gardening, the only recreation he allowed himself was horse riding, and even that he limited to about an hour a day.

Of company he kept very little. He had two or three old cronies in the district, and occasionally they dropped in for a chat, a pipe, and a glass. As may be inferred from what has been said, the colonel was necessarily a methodical man. He did everything in a systematic way. He rose at a fixed hour, spent a fixed time at his breakfast, and in reading his correspondence and papers; and then he sallied forth into his garden at a stated time, and at the same hour every day took his ride, while the greater part of each evening was spent in his tower, where

he had mounted an excellent telescope. When once he had gone upstairs to his observatory, not even his daughter Lydia ventured to disturb him. He hated to be intruded upon when absorbed in his astronomical studies, and this being well understood, he was allowed to enjoy his solitude.

One night during the first week of January, Lydia Hulton had gone in company with her mother, her sister, and one of her brothers, to Drury Lane Theatre, to witness the pantomime. Lydia had exhausted all her powers of persuasion in trying to induce her father to accompany the party, but he had resolutely declined, and had betaken himself early to his "Den," as he termed it. The weather had been exceptionally fine and frosty for some time, with brilliant nights, during which the stars shone with a clearness and splendour not often witnessed in the British metropolis; and it was not to be supposed that the colonel—enthusiast as he was—would abandon the study of the stars for the sake of witnessing a pantomime.

Of his servants, only two remained at home that evening, namely, Mrs. Starkie and her husband. The other two, Jane Farwig, the parlour-maid, and Mary Kavanagh, the maid-of-all-work, had leave to remain out until half-past eleven. Miss Lydia Hulton had arranged to spend the night with her mother, and return to Hammersmith in time for luncheon on the following day. Before that time, however, strange things were to happen.

Immediately beneath the floor of the observatory the two servants slept—Jane Farwig and Mary Kavanagh. It was a fairly large room, and each girl had a separate bed. They both retired to rest on this particular night soon after twelve. It was close

on midnight when they arrived home. Then they had "a mouthful of supper," and hurried off to their room.

Being very tired, they soon tumbled into bed and went to sleep. They did not get up until seven o'clock next morning. As they were dressing themselves, they discovered that the square of carpet covering the centre of the room, was in part saturated with moisture. Mary Kavanagh stepped on to this wet patch with her bare feet, and stooping to investigate the cause of the wet, she suddenly exclaimed—

"My God, it's blood!"

Her feet, she found, were wet with what seemed uncommonly like blood; and, glancing up to the ceiling, she found there was a large irregular stain just over the wet patch on the carpet, and moisture was still dripping from it; even as she looked, a large drop fell upon her face, and, wiping it off with her handkerchief, she found that it imparted to the handkerchief a blood-like mark.

Naturally, very much alarmed, the two young women hastily dressed themselves, and, hurrying downstairs, imparted their discovery to Mrs. Starkie, who had only just risen. Her husband was still snoring in bed. He had taken "a drop too much" the night previous, and was sleeping off the effects of it. On hearing what the girls had to say, Mrs. Starkie went up to her master's bedroom, and knocked at the door. It was her habit to convey to him every morning a cup of coffee at a quarter to nine, and he did not like to be disturbed before then.

His observatory was a sanctum sanctorum, and the only person privileged to enter it was his daughter Lydia; hence, the reason Mrs. Starkie went to his



bedroom first. Having knocked several times and got no response, she cautiously turned the handle and opened the door. Usually, he locked his door on retiring. Peeping in, she found the bed unoccupied. Then, afraid to go to the top of the house alone, she went and punched the ribs of her lord and master until she had aroused him to a sense of understanding. And having briefly explained what the servants had told her, he proceeded to the observatory, and she followed.

They found the door locked. Starkie, having knocked several times without eliciting a reply, came to the conclusion that something was decidedly wrong, and this opinion was strengthened when, having examined the servants' bedroom, he found that what looked like blood was still dripping from the ceiling, and the carpet beneath was saturated. When he had held a consultation with his wife and the other two servants, it was unanimously agreed that the best thing to do was to see a policeman.

So forth sallied Mr. Starkie, and after some searching he found a constable, who, having heard what the gardener had to tell, returned with him to the house, and, mounting to the top, the door of the observatory was forced. Then a ghastly sight met their view. Colonel Hulton was lying on the floor on his back. His arms were stretched out; one leg was drawn up, and from a wound in the neck blood still oozed.

A doctor was next summoned, but all he could do was to pronounce life extinct, and to express his opinion that the colonel had been shot. The bullet had cut clean through the left carotid artery, and penetrated deeply into the neck. The room was searched for a weapon, but no weapon could be found. So information

was sent at once to the police-station, and soon afterwards a telegram was despatched to me with a request that I would go out immediately.

I arrived only a few minutes after Miss Lydia, who, finding the house in a state of confusion, with policemen about, had been informed at once of what had occurred. The sudden announcement had brought on a fit of hysterics, and she was being attended by the servants in the dining-room.

The chief superintendent of the police of that district was Inspector Melville, and I found him waiting for me, together with the doctor who had been called. Accompanied by a constable, the three of us went to the observatory, and the medical man proceeded to make a minute examination of the deceased gentleman. The first opinion he had expressed was fully confirmed.

The colonel had met his death by a bullet wound in the throat. The bullet had passed through the left carotid artery, death must have ensued within a few minutes, and of course the flow of blood had been very great.

As there was no carpet on the floor, it had oozed rapidly through the interstices of the floor boards, so to the ceiling underneath; thence dripped on to the carpet in the servants' room. As there was no singeing about the wound, it could not have been self-inflicted, because for any one to shoot himself in the neck in that way, it would have been necessary for him to have held the weapon pretty close. But, as a matter of fact, no weapon was to be found, although the most careful search was made.

The testimony of the gardener and policeman was conclusive that the door was locked on the inside

when they burst it open; so the question was, how had the crime been committed? That it was a crime there was little room to doubt, and the whole case was shrouded in mystery.

The medical opinion was that the unfortunate gentleman had been dead for some hours; so that he must have been shot some time during the night, and probably soon after the two girls returned home.

Now, what could have been the motive of the crime? The criminal had evidently gone very much out of his way to commit it, and it was pretty evident that robbery had not been his object.

But there was another singular element, that at first certainly seemed puzzling. Where had the murderer concealed himself in order to carry out his diabolical purpose?

The chamber was circular in shape, with no angle or piece of furniture that would have afforded a hiding-place. From the testimony of Mrs. Starkie, and Jane Farwig, the parlour-maid, the colonel sat down to his frugal dinner at seven; and soon after half-past seven he retired to his observatory.

Almost immediately afterwards, Jane Farwig and Mary Kavanagh went out in accordance with a pre-arrangement, and Mrs. Starkie undertook to make the colonel's bed ready for him when he retired, and put in the hot-water bottle that he always had for his feet in cold weather.

He was also in the habit of partaking of a glass of whisky and water before retiring, together with some biscuits, and it was the parlour-maid's duty always to place these things on a little table in his room before she went to bed. On the night of the murder, Mrs. Starkie performed the duty, and went

to his room soon after the clock struck ten. While engaged in turning down the bed-clothes and putting the hot bottle in, the colonel entered the room to procure a book from a book-case in which he kept a number of scientific works.

On going out again he wished the housekeeper good night, and told her she could go to bed as soon as she liked, as he would not require anything more.

Now, let it be noted, the time was then between ten and half-past. Now arose the question, was the murderer in the observatory when the colonel returned to it? If so, he and his victim must have come face to face at once, for as I have already pointed out, there was no place where a man could have concealed himself. Unless the colonel had been instantly shot down, it was reasonable to suppose some disturbance would have taken place on the colonel's discovering an intruder in his sanctum.

But, as a matter of fact, I was convinced that nothing of the kind could have happened. No one was in the room when Colonel Hulton returned to it, and he locked his door as usual, more from the force of habit than as a precautionary measure, for he knew that the two servants were out, and there was no one in the house likely to intrude upon him.

He then took up his position on the cushioned platform, on which he reclined when using his telescope; and while lying there engaged in making his observations, he was shot in the neck. He had then probably leapt up, and fallen on the floor, and the blood had flowed like a stream from the wound in his neck.

With a view to determining from whence the shot had been fired, I proceeded to make a minute inspection

of the place. The observatory had formerly been a large garret, but it had been entirely rebuilt in circular form, and a dome-shaped roof added, the roof being of glass, shaded with blinds. Adjoining the observatory was a small storeroom, or lumber-closet, and it was lighted by a sliding glass panel in the wall of the main apartment. This room was used principally for storing old boxes, papers, and general lumber, and was seldom entered by any one.

I turned my attention to this lumber-closet. I found that some of the boxes had recently been disturbed, while broken cobwebs on the window panel showed that the panel had been opened lately. I had no hesitation, therefore, in determining that the fatal shot had been fired from the closet. The panel had been drawn back sufficiently to admit of the protrusion of the muzzle of the gun or pistol. My own impression at that time was that the weapon used was an air-gun; and this was subsequently confirmed when the post-mortem examination revealed the fact that the fatal wound had been inflicted with a long, thin slug, such as is used for an air-gun.

It was now clear that the assassin had obtained entrance to the house, had concealed himself in the closet, and carried out his fell purpose without attracting any attention. Now, how did he get in, and how did he get out again? There wasn't a doubt that he must have been well acquainted with the premises, and he was enabled to make his escape before the house was finally shut up for the night, after the two servants came home, assuming that he had gone out by one of the doors.

But in studying the problem I came to the conclusion that he did not enter or quit the house by

the usual mode of ingress and egress. Mrs. Starkie averred that she was always very particular to see that the place was well secured, particularly when the other servants were absent. She and her husband had sat that night in the kitchen. He smoked his pipe, and making the festive season an excuse for a little extra indulgence, had taken more beer than was good for him; about eleven o'clock his wife bundled him off to bed, while she remained up waiting for the girls to return. At half-past ten, or thereabouts, her master was all right, because she had seen him in his bedroom. And my opinion was that he was not killed until a considerable time after that.

The assassin waited until every one had retired before carrying out his fell purpose. The doctor said that when he first saw the deceased at eight o'clock, he had been dead four or five hours. If that was so, the crime must have been committed about three o'clock. If the assassin had been concealed in the closet in the early part of the evening, why did he wait so long before he put his wicked intention into execution? The situation of the house was lonely, and as an air gun had been used, he had no occasion to concern himself about the probabilities of raising an alarm.

When Miss Hulton had recovered somewhat from the terrible shock she had suffered, I sought an interview with her. She had been passionately attached to her father, and her distress may therefore be imagined. She was a very intelligent, thoughtful sort of girl, but she could suggest no theory for the crime at all. She said her father was a very quiet, peaceable, reserved man, and so far as she knew, he

had no enemies. She had never heard him speak ill of any one, and knew of no one who could have any object in taking his life.

In spite of this opinion, it was very evident that the poor gentleman must have had an enemy, and when I examined the crime in the light of logical and analytical reasoning, I felt sure that the act was an act of vengeance. The criminal had nursed a sense of real or imaginary wrong, and watching for his opportunity, had seized upon that night as peculiarly favourable for his fiendish purpose. Therefore, I settled two points to my own satisfaction: firstly, the assassin was well acquainted with the premises, and had watched the movements of the household; secondly, he had been actuated by a desire for vengeance.

My next step in the process of trying to unravel the mystery, was to determine how he had gained access to the closet. From the observatory landing a straight flight of stairs led down to a corridor. In the corridor was a window that looked on to the grounds.

A few feet beneath the outside sill of the window was a covered-in cistern, which was the stored water supply of the house. At one end of the cistern was a short permanently fixed wooden ladder, placed there for the convenience of examining the cistern. The foot of the ladder rested on the flat roof—also supporting the cistern—of a block of buildings which the colonel himself had added after he purchased the property. The basement of this block was a wash-house; above that was a bath-room, and above that again a spare bedroom.

Now, any one being on that part of the roof, would be able easily to mount the short permanent ladder

I have spoken of, get on to the top of the cistern, and from thence it was a matter of extreme ease to get into the house by the corridor window. But then the question had to be answered, how was the roof reached in the first instance? It was thirty-five feet at least from the ground. A ladder of something like forty feet in length would therefore have been required. And for one man to raise a ladder of that length would have been a physical impossibility, even supposing there had been such a ladder about the premises, which there was not.

These things considered, it might have seemed absurd to suppose that the assassin had entered and quitted the house by means of the corridor window. In fact, when I suggested it to Chief Superintendent Melville, he laughed at me, and said it *was* absurd. But that did not affect me. I was proving, or at any rate, endeavouring to prove to the best of my ability, that the theories I had set forth in my paper, "The Rationale of Detection," were not mere vapourings.

I descended from the window sill to the cistern covering, and by carefully examining it, I discovered unmistakable traces of footmarks. By means of the ladder I went down to the roof. There again were footmarks, and in these footmarks, faint traces of a reddish, powdery dirt. I collected some of this dirt, put it under the microscope, and found it to be the scrapings of bricks; it had been brought there by the feet of the miscreant. The roof was covered with zinc, and was flush with the wall.

At the angle formed by the corner of the building was a strong iron drain pipe, which went down to the ground, and with singular uniformity projected at least an inch from the wall, being held in position



by iron clips; there was one of these clips every four or five feet.

Going back to the house, I descended to the garden, stood at the foot of the iron drain pipe, and came to the conclusion that by means of that pipe the assassin had mounted and descended. It was not a feat that an ordinary man could have performed; but a sailor, for instance, or an acrobat, would have found no difficulty in it. Assuming this surmise of mine was right, it suggested that few crimes had been more deliberately planned, or carried out with more cold-blooded determination than this one.

I was satisfied in my own mind it was something more than mere theorizing on my part. I had determined the means of ingress and egress used by the assassin, and had thus forged an important link in the chain of evidence. Firstly, the fatal shot had been fired by means of an air gun from the closet adjoining the observatory. Secondly, the person who fired the shot had reached the closet by mounting up the iron pipe, thus reaching the water cistern, and from thence the corridor window. Moreover he had escaped by the same means.

These two points placed beyond doubt another, which was, that the criminal was well acquainted with the premises; and that in turn suggested that he might have been a discharged servant.

My inquiries were next directed to discover if this was so, and I had another interview with Miss Hulton. To my questions she said that her father had not discharged any man-servant to her knowledge. The Starkies, man and wife, had been with him for a long time; and the two girls, three and a half years, and a year and nine months respectively.

"Do you know, Miss Lydia," I next asked—"do you know of any one who was likely to have cherished a grudge against your father?"

"Absolutely no one," she exclaimed, with a passionate outburst of weeping.

"Has he had any suspicious visitor lately?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Your father was a reticent man, I think?"

"Yes, in many respects he was."

"I suppose it is quite possible, and even probable, that there might have been incidents in his life, even of late, that you knew nothing at all about?"

"Yes, it is possible," she answered, still sobbing.

"He might have had secrets which he would withhold even from you, his well-loved daughter?"

"I think it likely," she murmured, with a display of almost uncontrollable emotion.

I did not ply her with any further questions then. But what I had learnt seemed to me to have advanced the matter another stage. Colonel Hulton had been a very reticent man, and it was likely enough that in his life's history was some page he would have wished to blot out for ever. But our acts oft become our masters; and when we most desire that the dead past should bury its dead it allows the sheeted ghosts to haunt us and sometimes drive us mad or into our graves. I was sure now that Colonel Hulton had had a secret, and if that secret could be learnt the clue to the whole mystery would be found.

For the next few days the crime was the talk of London. It was so mysterious and to the general public so purposeless. Of course the enterprising reporters of the daily papers exhausted their wits in the endeavour to get hold of every shred of information

likely to be of interest to their hungering readers; and equally of course it became known that the colonel lived apart from his wife and family, his youngest daughter excepted. The curiosity of the curious was thereby greatly excited, and the spite of the spiteful found vent in the most unfounded and abominable assertions and innuendoes.

The coroner's inquiry, beyond proving that Colonel Hulton had been wilfully slain, and leading to a verdict of "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown," brought out nothing in evidence likely to be of use. The police were befogged. They had nothing to suggest, and nothing to say. As for myself, I had only got together a few links, and as so many more were wanted to make anything like a reliable chain of evidence, I was not disposed to even hint at what I suspected. It would only have served to warn the criminal, and put him on his guard.

When the unfortunate gentleman had been consigned to his last resting-place, I called upon his widow. She did not strike me as being a particularly bright or intelligent woman. Nor did she speak altogether kindly of her husband. She informed me that during four years they had lived apart, owing, as she termed it, "to incompatibility of temper," which really meant, I inferred, that she was light-headed and frivolous, while he was a deep-thinking, studious man, with an ingrained love for science.

Two such temperaments were hardly likely to weld, and the result was friction. There did not seem, however, to have been any serious quarrel, and now and again Mrs. Hulton had been out to see her husband. This was about the sum and substance of what I could learn from her. Beyond saying that her husband had

never made a confidante of her—and she said that with a good deal of bitterness—she could suggest or hint at nothing likely to aid me or give me a clue. One thing that I was sure of, absolutely sure, was that the assassin was well acquainted with the colonel's house.

How did he gain his knowledge? With a view to discovering this, I very closely questioned Mrs. Starkie. From her I learnt piecemeal that about the beginning of August preceding the colonel's death Lydia was away from home. She had gone with her mother, brothers, and sisters to the seaside for a week or two.

One morning during that time Mrs. Starkie went into the breakfast-room, where her master was having his breakfast. She found him in moody reverie, with his chin resting on his hands, and his elbows on the table, while before him was an open letter. Her entrance disturbed him, and jumping up he exclaimed with most unusual temper—

“Why did you come in without knocking?” But he added quickly, “Pardon me, Mrs. Starkie, I am rather put out, and my nerves are disturbed this morning.” Then, as he deliberately tore the letter into minute fragments and tossed them into the fireless grate, he said, “By the way, I want you to get the spare bedroom on the second landing ready. I expect a gentleman coming here to-morrow or the next day, and he may stay a few days.”

The morrow and the day after that came, but not the expected guest. Three or four evenings later, however, the colonel, who had been strolling about in his grounds, entered the house in company with a strange man. Mrs. Starkie met them in the passage, but as it was dusk she could not see the man well enough to be

able to describe him. The master spoke no word, but he and his visitor went into the dining-room. A few minutes later they passed upstairs, and went to the observatory. About half-past ten Colonel Hulton came down to the dining-room, and told the parlour-maid to leave the things on the table and go to bed. The next morning there was evidence that two persons had supped, and a bottle of champagne had been consumed, besides whisky. The spare bed had also been slept in, but the mysterious guest was gone.

Mrs. Starkie thought the circumstance singular, and her master's behaviour altogether unusual; but in a few days she had ceased to attach any importance to the incident, and she did not even mention it to Lydia when she returned from her holiday.

To my mind there was something very significant indeed in this story, and I felt that if the mystery of the murder was to be solved, the strange visitor must be discovered. According to the housekeeper's statement the visitor had arrived in the dusk of the evening, and in the early morning had departed. Why had he come late and gone early? The fact of his remaining in the house only a few hours, and those hours being of the night, did not weigh against my theory that the murderer knew the place. The remarkable visitor was there long enough to have made himself thoroughly acquainted with the run of the house—if he had been desirous of doing so.

Although I was averse to add in the slightest degree to Miss Lydia Hulton's sorrow, I felt constrained to ask her if she had been informed by her father that he had had a visitor in the summer during her absence. She assured me that he had not mentioned a word to her about it. This strengthened the significance of

the incident, and showed that he must have had some powerful motive for concealing the matter.

So far as Mrs. Starkie could describe the man, he was about six or seven and twenty. He might even have been a little older. He was fair-complexioned, and of light build; and she believed, as far as she could judge, that he was very shabbily dressed. It was obvious now from all this that Colonel Hulton, as I suspected, had had some dark page in his life, and between that dark page and the mysterious stranger there was a close connection.

With a view to try and get at the bottom of this, I, with the permission of Lydia and Mrs. Hulton, examined the colonel's papers and letters. But nothing helped me until, going over a bundle of cancelled cheques, I alighted on one that had been left uncrossed, and made payable to George Lehon. The name was French, and the cheque was drawn on a city bank. But what seemed to me of greater import was that the date of the cheque was the fifth of August. That was about the time of the strange man's visit to Colonel Hulton. The amount of the cheque was £200.

Without saying anything to any one, I put that cheque in my pocket, and proceeded at once to the bank. There inquiries elicited that the cashier who cashed the cheque remembered the transaction quite well. The cheque was presented on the day it was dated, and almost immediately after the bank opened. The person who presented it was a fair man, about seven or eight and twenty, with a lithe, spare figure, and a peculiar, furtive expression in his eyes. He was shabbily dressed, and spoke with a very pronounced foreign accent. The clerk was induced to take particular notice of him because he insisted that the

money should be paid him in sovereigns. Some of these he put loose into his trousers pocket. The rest he tied up in a cotton pocket-handkerchief he carried, and thrust that into the side pocket of his coat.

I was now convinced I had got a clue, and a very important one. The man who had visited Colonel Hulton in such an unusual way had gone to the house to get money, and that was proof that between him and the colonel was some dark secret, and that the secret was used as a means to extort the money.

The man's name was George Lehon, or at any rate he passed under that name. To him the cheque was given, and he presented it at the bank and drew payment. Lehon was a Frenchman, and it was by no means straining a point to suppose that he resided in France; that by some means he had discovered Hulton's address; had written to him; a few days later had turned up; had passed the night in the colonel's house; disappeared the next morning; had drawn his two hundred pounds, and gone—where? Deductively, I answered, back to France; and the reason that he had preferred gold was that English sovereigns were sterling, and that by changing them into French money in France he would gain on them.

This was a small point, but it was a part of the *minutiae* which I have always insisted must be taken into consideration by any one who would successfully follow up a clue. If I had struck the right trail, then it was no less clear to me that I must seek my man in France and not in England. George Lehon—or the man who went by that name—had killed Colonel Hulton as an act of spite or in revenge, and having committed the deed he fled to France again. So to

France I went, and the following night found me in Paris.

I lost no time in placing myself in communication with the police, and in a few hours I had learnt the following extraordinary fact. In the course of the preceding August an acrobat connected with a travelling circus, and known in his profession as Paul Pouchet, although his name was understood to be George Lehon, was arrested for a brutal assault on a companion, another acrobat named Jacques Mercier, whom he accused of having robbed him of some English gold.

As the money was traced to the possession of Mercier, who had changed some of it into francs at a "bureau de change," Lehon was let off with a light imprisonment and a fine.

After his release it was believed he went south, and nothing more had been heard of him. But by my request, inquiries were made by telegraph in different centres for Paul Pouchet, supposed to be travelling with a circus.

As is pretty generally known, every itinerant showman in France must be provided with a licence, and before he can exhibit in any town or village, he must present his licence, together with a list of his company, to the Prefect, the Maire, a magistrate, or the chief of police, as the case may be. Consequently, to trace a man like Pouchet in France, is an infinitely simpler matter to what it would be in England.

And as a matter of fact, before the day was over, we received an intimation from the police of a little town called Istres, in the Bouche du Rhone, and not very far from Marseilles, that a travelling circus was showing there, and in the company was an acrobat named Paul Pouchet.



By that night's mail train I started, in company with a French detective, for Marseilles, and the following day went on to Istres. We at once sought out an interview with the proprietor of the show, and learnt that between Christmas and the fortnight succeeding it, Pouchet had been absent. It was understood that he had gone to Paris on some business of his own. He was described as exceedingly clever as a tumbler and acrobat; but of a sullen, revengeful disposition. He had a wife and family in Lyons, and he had frequently been summoned for not contributing to their support. Since his return after his absence at Christmas time, he had been unusually moody, and had drank a great deal, the result being the proprietor had given him notice to quit next week, although he had been with him for some months, and was one of the most prominent members of the company.

Armed with these particulars, we made an application to the Maire to have Pouchet arrested. This was done, and his effects were seized. Amongst his things were found an air gun, in the form of a short walking-stick, and a box of slugs which were identical with the one which the doctors had extracted from Colonel Hulton's body. Also a packet of letters from Colonel Hulton. An examination of these letters left no doubt that we had found the colonel's murderer. He was subsequently removed to Paris, and I hurried off to London to obtain the necessary papers for his extradition. But before the formalities were completed, Pouchet, or Lehon, anticipated his doom by poisoning himself in prison.

He must have had the poison in his possession when first arrested, and believing that he had nothing to

hope for, he had put an end to his wretched existence. Evidence was forthcoming that he had been a reprobate and wastrel nearly all his life, and from certain documents amongst his effects, and other sources of information, it was revealed that his mother had been a cook in Colonel Hulton's employ soon after he returned from the Crimea, and that the colonel was Lehon's father, who had cast him off, owing to his disreputable conduct.

The letters showed that he had recently been making applications to his father for money, that these applications had been resolutely refused, and he was told that he might do whatever he liked, but he would be defied, and that if he went to England the law would be appealed to.

With his heart full of burning, revengeful feeling, the miscreant had crossed the Channel, stealthily made his way to Hulton's house, mounted to the top of the cistern by means of the water-pipe, with which he had no doubt previously made himself acquainted, reached the closet adjoining the observatory, and, having carried out his deed of blood, fled back to France—thinking no doubt that he could never possibly be traced. But the curse of Cain was upon him, and he had gone forth into the world pursued by the sleepless Demon of Remorse, who scourges to madness and death.

*THE STRANGE STORY OF SOME STATE  
PAPERS.*

HUMAN nature, *per se*, is one of the most complicated problems that the terrestrial globe presents us with. The student who attempts to solve it, finds himself for ever confronted with new aspects, new phases and factors that he never calculated upon, until, with a sense of utter despair, he is inclined to exclaim, "The human brain is utterly incapable of understanding that which is within itself." The world grows old; things and manners change; our mode of life is different to that of our forefathers, as theirs was different to that of primitive man. And yet human nature changes not, except in so far as external signs go; its primordial elements are precisely the same.

The cunning of savage man is replaced by the smirk hypocrisy of civilization, and wickedness is ever with us. It was a dictum of the philosophers of old that money and women were at the root of all evil; and the French, with the incisiveness so characteristic of them, say—when ought goes wrong, "*Cherchez la Femme.*" This is bitter, but it embodies a tremendous truth. And during a long career, in the course of which it has been my duty to see much of the shady side of men and women,

I can scarcely recall a case where the impelling influence of women has not been made manifest.

Woman, poor thing, has much to answer for, and as she tempted man to his original fall, it is perhaps in accordance with the eternal fitness of things that she should still lure him with forbidden fruit. And yet, let me hasten to say that, in my opinion, man is frequently more than contemptible for the ready way in which he yields, and as frequently as not, he deserves to be styled the Fool, instead of the Lord of Creation.

I have been induced to begin the story I have to tell with this little introduction, for its appositeness will, I think, be freely admitted, and it carries with it a moral which the story will enforce. For obvious reasons it is undesirable that I should give the real names of the characters who played their part in the remarkable little drama, but many middle-aged people will no doubt recognize the incidents. For though desperate efforts were made to conceal the facts from the public gaze, they leaked out, and the attempted suppression only served to whet the appetite of the curious for more, with the usual result. Garbled, inexact, and altogether incorrect versions found their way into certain public prints, whose conductors are always eager to dish up for their patrons any sensation or scandal, while out of very little they will make very much.

One grain of truth will, according to their views, admit of any amount of adulteration, and if the persons implicated are very high up in the social scale, so much the better, for certain of your journalistic purveyors of garbage is delighted to his heart's core when he can bespatter with his foul ink a lord or a

lady. In this instance, it was not a lord exactly, but nevertheless, those with whom I have to deal were conspicuous members of Society.

Without specifying the time too minutely, I may begin by saying that years ago the Austrian Ambassador at the Court of St. James, was Count Blank, a gentleman who was not only distinguished as a diplomatist, but as a scholar. The count was a widower, and one of his *attachés* was his eldest son, Ferdinand. The count and his son were very popular amongst all classes of society, and being wealthy, they dispensed their hospitality with a princely hand.

One summer's morning I found myself waiting in the count's elegantly furnished reception room, whither I had gone in response to an urgent message he had sent me. But as he was engaged on my arrival with a member of the English Cabinet, I had time to examine some of the exquisite works of art that adorned the room, for the count was famed as a virtuoso, and prided himself on his splendid collection of treasures.

In the course of a few minutes, however, a tall, handsome young fellow entered the room, and with a most graceful bow introduced himself to me as Ferdinand, the count's son. At this time they were both utter strangers to me. Ferdinand was about four and twenty, with a clean-cut face, blue eyes, and light hair, while his lips were shaded by a most artistically trimmed moustache. He was dressed in the height of fashion, but there was a self-consciousness about him that was not altogether pleasing.

It seemed to me that he posed, as it were, and studied effects. These things, however, were the weaknesses of well endowed youth, and though

objectionable, could be excused on the grounds that with riper years wisdom would come, and the meanness of vanity would be recognized.

"You haven't seen my father yet," he remarked, with an easy grace, as he leaned his back against the marble mantelpiece, and fixed his blue eyes upon me with a keen searching gaze, as though he was subjecting me to a process of mental analysis.

"No, sir, I have not," I answered.

"I am sorry you have to wait, but just before you came the count had to give audience to a Cabinet Minister, though I don't think he will be long. Did my father tell you in his letter why he wished to see you?"

"No. He gave no indication as to the nature of the business."

"Well, it's very important, and no less mysterious. By the way, Mr. Donovan, you have been mixed up in a good many mysterious cases in your time, have you not?"

"I think I may answer that in the affirmative."

"And I hear that you have some special faculty which enables you to get at the bottom of things which puzzle ordinary men." I bowed. "Well," added the young man, with a little laugh, as he drew out a cigarette from an elegant silver case, and proceeded to light it, "as far as I can understand this business, I fancy you will be baffled. It seems to me to be quite out of the ordinary."

"Possibly for that very reason it may prove less difficult. Riddles that on the first blush seem very complicated, generally, after a little consideration, show themselves to be very easy."

Ferdinand laughed again, displaying his white

teeth, and toying carelessly with his watch-chain. "Ah," he remarked, "you deucedly clever fellows never like to admit that you are mastered. But even a Napoleon in the art of detection is not infallible, you know."

"Quite true," I replied; "but I believe, with Edgar Allan Poe, that the human mind cannot invent a problem that is beyond human comprehension."

"Well, yes, I suppose that is true," muttered the young fellow, reflectively; and then after a slight pause he added, "And yet, think of the number of crimes that have gone unpunished. The inventors must be cleverer than the solvers."

I had no time to reply to this remark, as the door opened, and a liveried footman entered, and said that the count was ready to receive me. Bowing to Ferdinand, who did not seem inclined to throw his cigarette away, or change the easy position in which he had placed himself, I said—

"I'll wish you good morning, sir."

"Oh, we shall meet again," he answered jauntily, "and we'll renew the discussion, it interests me."

Following the footman, I was ushered into a large and spacious chamber, with a gilded ceiling and draped walls, that were adorned with some magnificent etchings. Seated at a large desk that was strewn with papers, was a tall, patriarchal-looking man, with iron-grey hair, and a silvery moustache. It was the count, and, rising with easy grace, he greeted me affably, and then requested that I would be seated, at the same time apologising for having kept me waiting.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Donovan," he began, "in the hope that you may prove of service in recovering

for me some highly important documents that have mysteriously disappeared. I may at once tell you that the stolen papers are a secret draft treaty between this country and my own country, and from a political point of view are of great value."

A troubled expression swept across the count's mobile and finely cut features as he said this, and he twisted his white hands one about the other as if the action was due to some keen mental distress.

"They were to have been transmitted to Austria by a special courier two days hence. But though I saw them myself safely locked up last night, they have disappeared during the night-time. Of course, a new copy of the draft can be prepared, but that is not the point. The papers have been purloined with a very sinister motive."

"You are quite sure, I presume, that they have really been stolen?" I asked.

"Oh dear yes," exclaimed the count, with an emphasized expression of trouble and concern on his face. "There cannot be a doubt about that."

"And what object do you think the thief had in view?"

"But one object. The treaty is framed against Russia, and some one in the pay of Russia has carried it off."

"I grasp the seriousness of the matter now," I answered, "for though, as you say, a new treaty can be drafted, the loss of the original one shows that there is a traitor in your camp, and that which it was important to keep secret from the powerful State of Russia will now become known——"

"Yes," interrupted the count, wringing his hands again, "and it may be the means of causing



very serious complications between Austria and her neighbour, even if it does not lead ultimately to war."

"You say the papers were stolen last night, count?"

"Yes. They were abstracted from my despatch-box between the hours of midnight and eight o'clock this morning."

"Where was the despatch-box kept?"

"In my own bedroom."

"Who took it there?"

"I did myself. I carried it up with my own hand, when I retired for the night."

"And are you quite sure, count, that the papers were in the box when you took it to your bedroom?"

"Absolutely certain. I had occasion to open the box a few minutes before retiring, and in doing so I glanced over the documents. I then locked the box and placed the key, which was one of a bunch, in a secret drawer in my *escritoire*."

"How was the box opened?"

"By means of a duplicate key; but it evidently did not fit well, and the lock was partially damaged. In fact, to some extent the lid has been forced."

"Do you suspect anybody?"

"No. I don't know who to suspect."

"But the robbery must have been committed by some member of your household?"

"Possibly—probably, I should say."

"How many persons slept in the house last night?"

"I should think a dozen at least, exclusive of the servants."

"I suppose, count, that among the *entourage* in contact with an ambassador, spies and traitors may sometimes be found?"

"I am sorry to say that is so, though less frequently than an outsider might imagine. But, of course, we take all necessary precautions. Yet, in spite of our efforts, State secrets will sometimes leak out."

"And State papers of great importance be stolen," I added.

"Yes, yes," he replied, with the troubled look again in his face. "In this instance, I am very much afraid a traitor has crept into the camp. Although I doubt if the papers can be recovered, and if they are, the secret they contain will be known, I deem it highly necessary that the traitor should be detected, and I rely upon you bringing him to light."

"I will do my best, count, though it is probable I may fail. Now I presume that it goes without saying that the person who has carried off these State papers must be directly or indirectly interested in Russia, or else some one in your household has been corrupted by Russian agents?"

"No doubt that is so. Russia has her spies everywhere. And it is a question now, Mr. Donovan, what steps you propose to take."

"It will be necessary, of course, for me to have a list of all the people who were in the house last night, and I must make the personal acquaintance of those people."

"But that is almost out of the question," exclaimed the count, in alarm. "If I were to introduce you to them their dignity would be wounded and their pride offended, for they would think that they were all lying under suspicion."

"Which, as a matter of fact, they are," I remarked.

"Well, no, I wouldn't go quite that length," answered the count, a little haughtily. "There is my

own son, for instance—I couldn't suspect him. And intimate and dear friends of mine—I couldn't suspect them."

"Have you made it known to all your suite that these documents have been stolen?"

"No. With the exception of my son, my confidential secretary, and my business secretary, nobody in the house knows anything at all about it."

"So far as you are aware, count."

"So far as I am aware," he answered.

"Well, count, in spite of what you have said, I repeat that it will be necessary for me to make the acquaintance of every person in your suite, as well as every member of your household. But you need not let this disturb your mind. I shall know them without their knowing me. I must be your guest for a day or two, and you may rest assured that I shall not betray you nor betray myself."

"I do not like your scheme," answered the count with some warmth. "It seems to me that it is hardly in accordance with those high notions of honour which——"

"Pardon me, count," I exclaimed, with a shrug of the shoulders as I rose from my chair. "If that is your view there is an end of the business. You yourself are no doubt a model of chivalry, of honour, of all that is noble. But will you pledge yourself that every one about you is the same? You have to deal with the hard fact that a very serious robbery has been committed; not by a common and ignorant thief, because a common and ignorant thief does not usually steal State papers. He would not know what to do with them. Now, if your house was not broken into on the night of the robbery, the person who carried off

the papers must have been numbered amongst those who slept under the roof that night. How is it possible for me to trace the thief unless I have some knowledge of those people? The black sheep is probably amongst them, and must be weeded out. But how is he to be detected unless some special means are taken to find him? Black sheep of this kind are very cunning, I assure you."

The count put his hand over his eyes and rested his elbow on his desk, and in a voice that plainly told how troubled he was, he said—

"You must excuse me; I did not see the affair in the light in which you now put it before me. You, of course, are right, and I am wrong. I place myself, therefore, unreservedly in your hands. What do you suggest?"

"I will make a suggestion a little later on. In the mean time I should like to see your bedroom and the position in which the box was placed on the night of the theft."

"Certainly, certainly. My valet shall take you upstairs and show you the rooms." The count was about to ring his bell when I stopped him, by saying—

"I should prefer, count, that you did not send your valet with me, nor any one else. If you will permit me to trouble you, I will ask you to go with me yourself."

The count readily consented to this, and, leading the way, he ascended a private staircase, and conducted me to his bedroom. It was a nobly proportioned chamber, furnished richly and with great taste. The room was about thirty-eight feet long, with several recesses in it. It was lighted by four windows, all on one side. The bed stood between two of these windows,

At one end of the apartment was a dressing and bath room; but they could only be reached through the main apartment. At the other end a door gave access to a smaller chamber, which the count informed me was his son's bedroom. The floor of both rooms was covered with an exceedingly rich and thick carpet, which deadened every footfall. The count's bed was a heavy, old-fashioned four-poster, draped with most costly silk-lined curtains.

Any one lying in the bed would have but a limited view of the room. The despatch-box had been placed on a table that stood against the wall, and between the bed and Ferdinand's room. I ascertained that the count always locked his door after his valet de chambre had retired, and he kept a light burning all night. But strangely enough, the previous night, when the papers were stolen, the door was not locked. When the count went to his room he was exceedingly tired, for he had had an excessively fatiguing and harassing day.

On attempting to lock his door after his valet de chambre had gone, he found there was something the matter with the key. He was too fatigued and too much absorbed to let this trouble him. He looked into his son's room, but he had not yet come up. So the count got into bed, thinking his son would not be long, and when he heard him he intended to call out to him. However, he fell asleep, and slept soundly until he was awakened by his valet bringing him his morning coffee. He did not discover that the box had been tampered with until he was fully dressed, and about to go downstairs.

On making the discovery he rushed to his son's room, but Ferdinand was sleeping heavily, and he had to

arouse him. The young man had been out on the previous evening, and did not return until two o'clock.

Having gathered these details, I proceeded to examine the key of the door, but found there was nothing the matter with it nor with the lock. It was therefore evident that whatever temporary obstruction had been introduced it had since been removed.

The count's valet de chambre was an Austrian, a sedate, middle-aged man, who had been in the count's service for many years. All the other servants were Austrians, with the exception of the chef, who was a Frenchman, distinguished in his particular line.

Having so far completed my examination of the bed-chambers, I returned in company with the count to his room, where Ferdinand was sitting waiting.

"Well, what success have you had?" the young fellow asked of me as we entered.

"None. Have you any theory, sir, of your own?"

"My only theory is this. Somebody tampered with the key of the count's chamber door, so that the door could not be locked. That showed an exceeding artfulness. Of course, the person who tampered with the key was either bribed to do so, or he was the person who stole the papers."

"Whom do you suspect of having tampered with the key?"

"I don't suspect any one in particular."

"But you must have an idea?"

"Perhaps I have."

"May I then ask you, sir, to name the person you think might possibly have done this thing?"

"No; I'll do nothing of the sort," he answered decisively. "I have no right to cast suspicion on any

one unless I had some good grounds for believing that I might be right."

"But I understand you to say that you had some idea," I remarked.

"So I have, but I decline to shape it in words. Mere suspicion is not proof, and my idea might be wrong."

"I agree with you quite," I remarked, "and yet there should be no false delicacy in this matter. It is a very serious business, and no obstacle should be thrown in the way of trying to get at the truth."

During this short dialogue the count had remained silent, but after my last remark he said to his son—

"I think, Ferdinand, that if you have the slightest reason for suspecting any particular individual, you need not hesitate to mention the name of the person to Mr. Donovan."

The son bowed to his father, and said—

"I must decline, sir, to clothe my thought with words." Then, addressing me, he asked, "What course are you going to pursue?"

"I have decided on no particular course at present. In matters of this kind I allow myself to be very largely guided and influenced by circumstances."

"But have no circumstances influenced you in this instance?"

"To some extent they have."

"Then have you not decided what you are going to do?"

"I have not," I replied, in a tone which I meant should indicate that I did not wish to be further questioned on my plans.

The young man no doubt understood me, for he said nothing more, and intimating that I would probably

return in the course of two hours, I took my leave, but I purposely remained away only about twenty minutes. Then I returned and sent a little note to the count, in which I asked him to grant me five minutes' interview unknown to any one. He came to me at once in the ante-room, looking somewhat surprised.

"I have come back, count, for a special purpose. You lunch, I believe, in about an hour and a half's time?"

"That is so."

"Then I shall return when you are at lunch. And I want you to give your valet de chambre special instructions to receive me, and at once conduct me to your bed-chamber, where I am to be left entirely alone for half an hour."

The count stared at me with a puzzled, anxious, and troubled look. Then he stammered—

"Really—I—that is, upon my word, I don't quite gather your meaning."

"Surely, count, my request is sufficiently clear," I remarked.

"Oh yes, the request itself is free from any ambiguity. But it seems to me so extraordinary that I venture to say you should explain why you make it."

"I make it in the hope that I may get a clue to the person who has stolen the State papers."

"But how, in the name of common sense, do you expect to get a clue by being shut up in my bedroom for half an hour?"

"It is not for me to answer that question now. Indeed, I must respectfully decline to answer it. And unless you allow me to proceed in my own way, and according to my lights, I shall have to retire from the case altogether."



For two or three minutes the count seemed unable to make up his mind; but at last said—

“Very well, your request shall be complied with, although it seems to me an eccentric one. But I have no right to dictate to you how you should conduct your own business. Therefore I will instruct my valet to receive you, and show you upstairs.”

“I have one more request,” I added. “It is this. I must particularly impress upon you the necessity of keeping this arrangement from coming to the knowledge of any living soul except your valet, and I beg that you will order him to keep the secret.”

“Well, of course, since I have gone so far, I suppose I must humour you in this,” he answered. “You will find the valet an intelligent and excellent fellow, and if he can be of service to you, I am sure he will be.”

“But I gather from what you have told me that he knows nothing about the robbery?”

“No. He has not been told.”

“Then please let him be kept in ignorance.”

The count consented to this, but from the expression on his face, and the strange look in his eyes, I fancy he thought I was not possessed of such an amount of intelligence and reasoning power as would entitle me to be regarded as absolutely sane. If any such thought as this really flitted through his mind, he would probably have justified himself by saying that I was acting in a way that was quite beyond his comprehension. No doubt I was; but he did not consider that the ways of the trained detective are not the ways of the layman. He was very polite, however, and bowed to me as I withdrew.

At luncheon-time I returned. The footman who admitted me seemed a little surprised when I asked

for the count's valet de chambre, and showed a disposition to inquire my business, for I had not seen this man before. But the valet, who, of course, was expecting me, appeared on the scene, and as I followed him up the grand staircase, the flunkey looked as though his pride had been rather severely hurt. In obedience to his instructions the valet led me to his master's room, where he lingered, as though he did not quite like the idea of leaving me there. So I reminded him that I could dispense with his service for the time being, and accordingly he withdrew. Then I locked the door, and remained shut up in the apartment for something like half an hour. At the end of that time I had obtained the clue which I anticipated I should get, and, throwing open the door, I found the valet waiting for me on the landing. He regarded me curiously, and his face indicated that he was burning to question me; but my bearing and manner towards him gave him no encouragement. He therefore remained silent, and led the way downstairs, where I requested him to supply me with writing materials, as I wished to address a note to the count. He showed me into a small waiting-room, where I penned the following letter:—

“YOUR EXCELLENCY,

“I have obtained an important clue, which I am desirous of following up with your assistance. To this end I must ask you to receive as your guest this evening a person with whom I am very intimately acquainted—a French priest, named Paul Verney. He does not speak English, and is a singularly reserved man. You will be good enough to allow him to dine at your table, and kindly take no notice of anything

he may do or say, however eccentric it may seem. If he wishes to go out he must be free to do so; and should he desire to remain all night I pray that you will let him have a room. Your excellency's strict observance of these details will probably facilitate the recovery of the missing State papers. But, should my friend's movements be hampered in any way, my attempts to solve the mystery will be entirely thwarted. Subject to the report made to me by my friend, the priest, I will call upon you myself in the course of to-morrow or the following day.

"I have the honour to be your excellency's most obedient servant,

"DICK DONOVAN."

Sealing this letter up I marked it "Private and confidential," and, handing it to the servant, bade him deliver it to his master without a moment's delay, as the letter was of very great importance. That bit of business finished, I took my departure.

The count evidently followed out my requests to the letter, for when in the course of the afternoon my friend Paul Verney called and sent up his card he was at once admitted to the ambassador's presence, and later on he dined with the count and his friends. Verney was a smooth-faced man, with flowing silvery hair that gave him a venerable appearance. Having very weak eyes, he wore smoke-coloured glasses. His clerical attire was faultless, and from his neck was suspended a little golden crucifix. The dinner-party consisted of fourteen persons, including the count's son and two ministers of the English cabinet.

It was nine o'clock before his excellency rose from the table, and the party began to separate. Almost

immediately the priest stepped out of the room, and a little while afterwards he was driving in a hansom cab that was following another cab, both of them going west. He alighted near Hyde Park Corner, and disappeared in the darkness.

I was unable to call upon the count the following day, but the day after that I did so. He received me at once.

"I am glad you have come," he said; "but I confess that you are altogether mystifying me. Why in the name of goodness did you consider it necessary that I should entertain your friend Verney?"

"I hope he did not do anything or say anything that was not strictly in accordance with etiquette," I exclaimed anxiously.

"Oh dear no," answered the count. "On the contrary, he was the pink of politeness, and exceedingly good company. I honestly confess I was taken with the fellow, but when we were about to retire to the smoking-room he suddenly slipped away without saying a word to me, and I saw him no more."

I broke out into a laugh, as I remarked—

"Detectives are curious fellows, and frequently the exigencies of their calling place them in trying situations."

"But you don't mean to say that the priest was a detective?"

"Yes, your excellency, I do mean to say so."

"Well, you astonish me. But perhaps the priest was not a priest at all?"

"Your conjecture is right. He was not a priest. The character was assumed."

"By whom?"

"Your humble and obedient servant."

At this announcement the count seemed inclined to be angry ; but, with a cold smile, he said stiffly—

“Permit me to congratulate you, Mr. Donovan, on the excellency of your acting, the perfectness of your disguise. I hadn’t the remotest idea that Paul Verney, the French priest, was yourself.”

“I feel highly complimented, count,” I answered, with a profound bow.

“But pray, sir, what has come out of this masquerading ?” demanded the ambassador.

“It has enabled me, count,” I answered, “to have the satisfaction of restoring to your excellency the stolen papers.”

As I spoke I laid a small brown-paper parcel before him. He looked at me for some moments in a dazed kind of way. Then, with trembling hands, he untied the red tape that bound the parcel, and opening out the documents it contained, he found that they were the identical papers that had been taken from his despatch-box.

It was some time before he could sufficiently command his voice to speak ; then rising, he laid one hand on my shoulder, and with the other he grasped my hand, shaking it cordially.

“This is wonderful—wonderful !” he exclaimed. “But tell me who is the thief. Who is the villain ?”

“Before I answer that question, count, permit me to retire for a few minutes,” I said.

The count bowed an assent, and I left the room. In a few minutes I returned, accompanied by Ferdinand, who, hurrying across the room, fell at his father’s feet, and covering his face with his hands, exclaimed in German—

“Father, father, I am the guilty person !”

An ashen paleness spread over the count's face, and he looked as if he had been stricken with some mortal illness. I felt that I had no business to be present during the painful scene between the father and son, nor can I gratify my reader's curiosity by recounting what took place. But I may tell how I was enabled to solve the problem, and restore the missing papers.

At my very first interview with Ferdinand I was struck with his apparent want of sincerity, and when I went to the count's bedroom and found that his son's adjoined I began to think it was within the bounds of possibility that the son himself was the guilty person. It must be remembered that I particularly inquired of the count how many people were in his confidence with regard to the papers, and his answer was, only his private and business secretaries besides his son. My first thought was that one of these two persons was, or perhaps both, were guilty. But when I found that Ferdinand's room communicated with his father's my suspicion fell upon him.

This suspicion was strengthened when, unknown to any one, I picked up in Ferdinand's room a small piece of wax, on which was a faint impression of the wards of a key. When my request to be left alone in the room was granted I made a thorough examination of Ferdinand's room. In the drawer of a cabinet I found some letters written in Russian. They were from a lady, and addressed to the young man, and here at once was suggested a reason for the evil deed. *Cherchez la femme!* The woman was found, so it seemed. My want of knowledge of Russian prevented my reading them, but I was acquainted with a few of the endearing epithets used by Russian lovers, and from this I was enabled to make out that they were

love letters. In the same drawer was the photograph of a most beautiful woman. On the back of the photograph was the name and address of the photographer.

The name was Russian, the address St. Petersburg. All the letters were signed with a Christian name only, so that I had no means of knowing who the writer was; but I guessed she was represented by the photograph which I took the liberty of temporarily appropriating, and from the inquiries I subsequently made I found the original of the photo was the daughter of a Russian lady well-known in London society, where she was regarded as a spy and an intriguer of exceptional cleverness. This discovery strengthened my hand, and, disguised as a French priest, I managed to sit next to Ferdinand at his father's dinner-table; when the wine had circulated I led him into conversation, and incidentally asked if he could tell me if a certain Russian lady, the one I have referred to, resided in London. He became confused, and turned the conversation, without directly answering my question.

Determined to keep him under close surveillance, I followed him when he left the room. He had previously wished me good night, saying he was going out. He did go out, and, hailing a hansom, drove to the Grosvenor Mansions; and the house he went to, I learnt, was the residence of the Russian lady and her daughter. They rented the house furnished. They were rich, lived in good style, and were noted for their princely receptions.

The following day I called, and requested to see the daughter on a matter of urgent business. She was very handsome, but older than Ferdinand by four or five years. After a short conversation I came to the

conclusion that she was as unprincipled as she was clever; but when I had made sure of my ground I unhesitatingly accused her of having instigated the count's son to purloin the State papers. At first she denied this with a display of passionate indignation, but it was too insincere to deceive me; and, telling her who I was, I pointed out that if she wished to avoid a public scandal, which would probably be the social ruin of herself and the young man, she would give up the papers.

After much denial, many protestations, and ineffectual attempts to wriggle off the horns of the dilemma on which I had impaled her, she burst into tears, and, finding that they did not affect me, she gave in at last, confessed that she had the papers, but declared that Ferdinand voluntarily brought them to her. I need scarcely say I did not believe that. She, acting no doubt under her mother's prompting, lured him to his fall.

I left that house with the papers in my possession, and my next step was to see Ferdinand and get him to realize how terribly serious the position was in which he had placed himself. When he learnt how much I knew, he made a clean breast of it. He said that the lady had perfectly fascinated him, and since he had made her acquaintance he had been like one in a trance. So madly was he infatuated that he believed he would have hesitated at nothing that would have won him his charmer's favour. At that time it was pretty well known that, owing to certain menacing movements on the part of Russia, directed principally against Hungary, the Austrian ambassador had managed to enter into a treaty with England, bearing upon the point. The Russian adventuress—for she was little



better than that—had used the silly young man as a means of betraying the secrets to the Russian Government, and had I not been fortunate enough to make the discovery I did, those papers would very soon have been on their way to Russia.

I felt that it was far better that the erring young man should, if possible, settle the affair with his father without any interference on my part. I have reason to know, however, that the count was furious. To be deceived by his own son in such a way was heart-breaking, and he banished him from his sight. A day or two later Ferdinand returned to Austria in disgrace, and subsequently went to India, where he remained until his father's death, which occurred five years later. To the last the count refused to be reconciled to him. Since then Ferdinand has spent many years of his life in the consular service of his country, and elected to bury himself in an obscure second-rate French post. That evil act of his unbridled youth, when he sullied his honour and betrayed the great confidence his father reposed in him, cast a shadow over his life which nothing in this world could remove. Fletcher uttered a tremendous truth when he wrote—

“Our acts our angels are for good or ill,  
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.”

## *THE PROBLEM OF DEAD WOOD HALL.*

“MYSTERIOUS CASE IN CHESHIRE.” So ran the heading to a paragraph in all the morning papers some years ago, and prominence was given to the following particulars:—

“A gentleman bearing the somewhat curious name of Tuscan Trankler, resided in a picturesque old mansion, known as Dead Wood Hall, situated in one of the most beautiful and lonely parts of Cheshire, not very far from the quaint, and old-time village of Knutsford. Mr. Trankler had given a dinner-party at his house, and amongst the guests was a very well-known county magistrate and landowner, Mr. Manville Charnworth. It appeared that, soon after the ladies had retired from the table, Mr. Charnworth rose and went into the grounds, saying he wanted a little air. He was smoking a cigar, and in the enjoyment of perfect health. He had drunk wine, however, rather freely, as was his wont, but though on exceedingly good terms with himself and every one else, he was perfectly sober. An hour passed, but Mr. Charnworth had not returned to the table. Though this did not arouse any alarm, as it was thought that he had probably joined the ladies, for he was what is called “A ladies’ man,” and preferred the company of females

to that of men. A tremendous sensation, however, was caused when, a little later, it was announced that Charnworth had been found insensible, lying on his back in a shrubbery. Medical assistance was at once summoned, and when it arrived the opinion expressed was that the unfortunate gentleman had been stricken with apoplexy. For some reason or other, however, the doctors were led to modify that view, for symptoms were observed which pointed to what was thought to be a peculiar form of poisoning, although the poison could not be determined. After a time, Charnworth recovered consciousness, but was quite unable to give any information. He seemed to be dazed and confused, and was evidently suffering great pain. At last his limbs began to swell, and swelled to an enormous size; his eyes sunk, his cheeks fell in, his lips turned black, and mortification appeared in the extremities. Everything that could be done for the unfortunate man was done, but without avail. After six hours' suffering, he died in a paroxysm of raving madness, during which he had to be held down in the bed by several strong men.

The post-mortem examination, which was necessarily held, revealed the curious fact that the blood in the body had become thin and purplish, with a faint strange odour that could not be identified. All the organs were extensively congested, and the flesh presented every appearance of rapid decomposition. In fact, twelve hours after death putrefaction had taken place. The medical gentlemen who had the case in hand were greatly puzzled, and were at a loss to determine the precise cause of death. The deceased had been a very healthy man, and there was no actual organic disease of any kind. In short, everything

pointed to poisoning. It was noted that on the left side of the neck was a tiny scratch, with a slightly livid appearance, such as might have been made by a small sharply pointed instrument. The viscera having been secured for purposes of analysis, the body was hurriedly buried within thirty hours of death.

The result of the analysis was to make clear that the unfortunate gentleman had died through some very powerful and irritant poison being introduced into the blood. That it was a case of blood-poisoning there was hardly room for the shadow of a doubt, but the science of that day was quite unable to say what the poison was, or how it had got into the body. There was no reason—so far as could be ascertained—to suspect foul play, and even less reason to suspect suicide. Altogether, therefore, the case was one of profound mystery, and the coroner's jury were compelled to return an open verdict. Such were the details that were made public at the time of Mr. Charnworth's death; and from the social position of all the parties, the affair was something more than a nine days' wonder; while in Cheshire itself, it created a profound sensation. But, as no further information was forthcoming, the matter ceased to interest the outside world, and so, as far as the public were concerned, it was relegated to the limbo of forgotten things.

Two years later, Mr. Ferdinand Trankler, eldest son of Tuscan Trankler, accompanied a large party of friends for a day's shooting in Mere Forest. He was a young man, about five and twenty years of age; was in the most perfect health, and had scarcely ever had a day's illness in his life. Deservedly

popular and beloved, he had a large circle of warm friends, and was about to be married to a charming young lady, a member of an old Cheshire family who were extensive landed proprietors and property owners. His prospects therefore seemed to be unclouded, and his happiness complete.

The shooting-party was divided into three sections, each agreeing to shoot over a different part of the forest, and to meet in the afternoon for refreshments at an appointed rendezvous.

Young Trankler and his companions kept pretty well together for some little time, but ultimately began to spread about a good deal. At the appointed hour the friends all met, with the exception of Trankler. He was not there. His absence did not cause any alarm, as it was thought he would soon turn up. He was known to be well acquainted with the forest, and the supposition was he had strayed farther afield than the rest. By the time the repast was finished, however, he had not put in an appearance. Then, for the first time, the company began to feel some uneasiness, and vague hints that possibly an accident had happened were thrown out. Hints at last took the form of definite expressions of alarm, and search parties were at once organized to go in search of the absent young man, for only on the hypothesis of some untoward event could his prolonged absence be accounted for, inasmuch as it was not deemed in the least likely that he would show such a lack of courtesy as to go off and leave his friends without a word of explanation. For two hours the search was kept up without any result. Darkness was then closing in, and the now painfully anxious searchers began to feel that they would have to desist until daylight returned.

But at last some of the more energetic and active members of the party came upon Trankler lying on his side, and nearly entirely hidden by masses of half withered bracken. He was lying near a little stream that meandered through the forest, and near a keeper's shelter that was constructed with logs and thatched with pine boughs. He was stone dead, and his appearance caused his friends to shrink back with horror, for he was not only black in the face, but his body was bloated, and his limbs seemed swollen to twice their natural size.

Amongst the party were two medical men, who, being hastily summoned, proceeded at once to make an examination. They expressed an opinion that the young man had been dead for some time, but they could not account for his death, as there was no wound to be observed. As a matter of fact, his gun was lying near him with both barrels loaded. Moreover, his appearance was not compatible at all with death from a gun-shot wound. How then had he died. The consternation amongst those who had known him can well be imagined, and with a sense of suppressed horror, it was whispered that the strange condition of the dead man coincided with that of Mr. Manville Charnworth, the county magistrate who had died so mysteriously two years previously.

As soon as it was possible to do so, Ferdinand Trankler's body was removed to Dead Wood Hall, and his people were stricken with profound grief when they realized that the hope and joy of their house was dead. Of course an autopsy had to be performed, owing to the ignorance of the medical men as to the cause of death. And this post-mortem examination disclosed the fact that all the extraordinary

appearances which had been noticed in Mr. Charnworth's case, were present in this one. There was the same purplish coloured blood; the same gangrenous condition of the limbs; but as with Charnworth, so with Trankler, all the organs were healthy. There was no organic disease to account for death. As it was pretty certain, therefore, that death was not due to natural causes, a coroner's inquest was held, and while the medical evidence made it unmistakably clear that young Trankler had been cut down in the flower of his youth and while he was in radiant health by some powerful and potent means which had suddenly destroyed life, no one had the boldness to suggest what those means were, beyond saying that blood poisoning of a most violent character had been set up. Now, it was very obvious that blood-poisoning could not have originated without some specific cause, and the most patient investigation was directed to trying to find out the cause, while exhaustive inquiries were made, but at the end of them, the solution of the mystery was as far off as ever, for these investigations had been in the wrong channel, not one scrap of evidence was brought forward which would have justified a definite statement that this or that had been responsible for the young man's death.

It was remembered that when the post-mortem examination of Mr. Charnworth took place, a tiny bluish scratch was observed on the left side of the neck. But it was so small, and apparently so unimportant that it was not taken into consideration when attempts were made to solve the problem of "How did the man die?" When the doctors examined Mr. Trankler's body, they looked to see if there was a similar puncture or scratch, and, to their astonishment,

they did find rather a curious mark on the left side of the neck, just under the ear. It was a slight abrasion of the skin, about an inch long as if he had been scratched with a pin, and this abrasion was a faint blue, approximating in colour to the tattoo marks on a sailor's arm. The similarity in this scratch to that which had been observed on Mr. Charnworth's body, necessarily gave rise to a good deal of comment amongst the doctors, though they could not arrive at any definite conclusion respecting it. One man went so far as to express an opinion that it was due to an insect or the bite of a snake. But this theory found no supporters, for it was argued that the similar wound on Mr. Charnworth could hardly have resulted from an insect or snake bite, for he had died in his friend's garden. Besides, there was no insect or snake in England capable of killing a man as these two men had been killed. That theory, therefore, fell to the ground; and medical science as represented by the local gentlemen had to confess itself baffled; while the coroner's jury were forced to again return an open verdict.

"There was no evidence to prove how the deceased had come by his death."

This verdict was considered highly unsatisfactory, but what other could have been returned. There was nothing to support the theory of foul play; on the other hand, no evidence was forthcoming to explain away the mystery which surrounded the deaths of Charnworth and Trankler. The two men had apparently died from precisely the same cause, and under circumstances which were as mysterious as they were startling, but what the cause was, no one seemed able to determine.



Universal sympathy was felt with the friends and relatives of young Trankler, who had perished so unaccountably while in pursuit of pleasure. Had he been taken suddenly ill at home and had died in his bed, even though the same symptoms and morbid appearances had manifested themselves, the mystery would not have been so great. But as Charnworth's end came in his host's garden after a dinner-party; so young Trankler died in a forest while he and his friends were engaged in shooting. There was certainly something truly remarkable that two men, exhibiting all the same post-mortem effects, should have died in such a way; their deaths, in point of time, being separated by a period of two years. On the face of it, it seemed impossible that it could be merely a coincidence. It will be gathered from the foregoing, that in this double tragedy were all the elements of a romance well calculated to stimulate public curiosity to the highest pitch; while the friends and relatives of the two deceased gentlemen were of opinion that the matter ought not to be allowed to drop with the return of the verdict of the coroner's jury. An investigation seemed to be urgently called for. Of course, an investigation of a kind had taken place by the local police, but something more than that was required, so thought the friends. And an application was made to me to go down to Dead Wood Hall; and bring such skill as I possessed to bear on the case, in the hope that the veil of mystery might be drawn aside, and light let in where all was then dark.

Dead Wood Hall was a curious place, with a certain gloominess of aspect which seemed to suggest that it

was a fitting scene for a tragedy. It was a large, massive house, heavily timbered in front in a way peculiar to many of the old Cheshire mansions. It stood in extensive grounds, and being situated on a rise commanded a very fine panoramic view which embraced the Derbyshire Hills. How it got its name of Dead Wood Hall no one seemed to know exactly. There was a tradition that it had originally been known as Dark Wood Hall; but the word "Dark" had been corrupted into "Dead." The Tranklers came into possession of the property by purchase, and the family had been the owners of it for something like thirty years.

With great circumstantiality I was told the story of the death of each man, together with the results of the post-mortem examination, and the steps that had been taken by the police. On further inquiry I found that the police, in spite of the mystery surrounding the case, were firmly of opinion that the death of the two men was, after all, due to natural causes, and that the similarity in the appearance of the bodies after death *was* a mere coincidence. The superintendent of the county constabulary, who had had charge of the matter, waxed rather warm; for he said that all sorts of ridiculous stories had been set afloat, and absurd theories had been suggested, not one of which would have done credit to the intelligence of an average schoolboy.

"People lose their heads so, and make such fools of themselves in matters of this kind," he said warmly; "and of course the police are accused of being stupid, ignorant, and all the rest of it. They seem, in fact, to have a notion that we are endowed with superhuman faculties, and that nothing should baffle us. But, as

a matter of fact, it is the doctors who are at fault in this instance. They are confronted with a new disease, about which they are ignorant; and, in order to conceal their want of knowledge, they at once raise the cry of 'foul play.'"

"Then you are clearly of opinion that Mr. Charnworth and Mr. Trankler died of a disease," I remarked.

"Undoubtedly I am."

"Then how do you explain the rapidity of the death in each case, and the similarity in the appearance of the dead bodies?"

"It isn't for me to explain that at all. That is doctors' work, not police work. If the doctors can't explain it, how can I be expected to do so? I only know this, I've put some of my best men on to the job, and they've failed to find anything that would suggest foul play."

"And that convinces you absolutely that there has been no foul play?"

"Absolutely."

"I suppose you were personally acquainted with both gentlemen? What sort of man was Mr. Charnworth?"

"Oh, well, he was right enough, as such men go. He made a good many blunders as a magistrate; but all magistrates do that. You see, fellows get put on the bench who are no more fit to be magistrates than you are, sir. It's a matter of influence more often as not. Mr. Charnworth was no worse and no better than a lot of others I could name."

"What opinion did you form of his private character?"

"Ah, now, there, that's another matter," answered the superintendent, in a confidential tone, and with a

smile playing about his lips. "You see, Mr. Charnworth was a bachelor."

"So are thousands of other men," I answered. "But bachelorhood is not considered dishonourable in this country."

"No, perhaps not. But they say as how the reason was that Mr. Charnworth didn't get married was because he didn't care for having only one wife."

"You mean he was fond of ladies generally. A sort of general lover."

"I should think he was," said the superintendent, with a twinkle in his eye, which was meant to convey a good deal of meaning. "I've heard some queer stories about him."

"What is the nature of the stories?" I asked, thinking that I might get something to guide me.

"Oh, well, I don't attach much importance to them myself," he said, half-apologetically; "but the fact is, there was some scandal talked about Mr. Charnworth."

"What was the nature of the scandal?"

"Mind you," urged the superintendent, evidently anxious to be freed from any responsibility for the scandal whatever it was, "I only tell you the story as I heard it. Mr. Charnworth liked his little flirtations, no doubt, as we all do; but he was a gentleman and a magistrate, and I have no right to say anything against him that I know nothing about myself."

"While a gentleman may be a magistrate, a magistrate is not always a gentleman," I remarked.

"True, true; but Mr. Charnworth was. He was a fine specimen of a gentleman, and was very liberal. He did me many kindnesses."

"Therefore, in your sight, at least, sir, he was without blemish."

"I don't go as far as that," replied the superintendent, a little warmly; "I only want to be just."

"I give you full credit for that," I answered; "but please to tell me about the scandal you spoke of. It is just possible it may afford me a clue."

"I don't think that it will. However, here is the story. A young lady lived in Knutsford by the name of Downie. She is the daughter of the late George Downie, who for many years carried on the business of a miller. Hester Downie was said to be one of the prettiest girls in Cheshire, or, at any rate, in this part of Cheshire, and rumour has it that she flirted with both Charnworth and Trankler."

"Is that all that rumour says?" I asked.

"No, there was a good deal more said. But, as I have told you, I know nothing for certain, and so must decline to commit myself to any statement for which there could be no better foundation than common gossip."

"Does Miss Downie still live in Knutsford?"

"No; she disappeared mysteriously soon after Charnworth's death."

"And you don't know where she is?"

"No; I have no idea."

As I did not see that there was much more to be gained from the superintendent I left him, and at once sought an interview with the leading medical man who had made the autopsy of the two bodies. He was a man who was somewhat puffed up with a belief in his own cleverness, but he gave me the impression that, if anything, he was a little below the average country practitioner. He hadn't a single theory to advance to account for the deaths of Charnworth and Trankler. He confessed that he was mystified; that

all the appearances were entirely new to him, for neither in his reading nor his practice had he ever heard of a similar case.

"Are you disposed to think, sir, that these two men came to their end by foul play?" I asked.

"No, I am not," he answered definitely, "and I said so at the inquest. Foul play means murder, cool and deliberate, and planned and carried out with fiendish cunning. Besides, if it was murder how was the murder committed?"

"*If it was murder,*" I answered significantly "I shall hope to answer that question later on."

"But I am convinced it wasn't murder," returned the doctor, with a self-confident air. "If a man is shot, or bludgeoned, or poisoned, there is something to go upon. I scarcely know of a poison that cannot be detected. And not a trace of poison was found in the organs of either man. Science has made tremendous strides of late years, and I doubt if she has much more to teach us in that respect. Anyway, I assert without fear of contradiction that Charnworth and Trankler did not die of poison."

"What killed them, then?" I asked, bluntly and sharply.

The doctor did not like the question, and there was a roughness in his tone as he answered—

"I'm not prepared to say. If I could have assigned a precise cause of death the coroner's verdict would have been different."

"Then you admit that the whole affair is a problem which you are incapable of solving?"

"Frankly, I do," he answered, after a pause. "There are certain peculiarities in the case that I should like to see cleared up. In fact, in the interests of my

profession, I think it is most desirable that the mystery surrounding the death of the unfortunate men should be solved. And I have been trying experiments recently with a view to attaining that end, though without success."

My interview with this gentleman had not advanced matters, for it only served to show me that the doctors were quite baffled, and I confess that that did not altogether encourage me. Where they had failed, how could I hope to succeed? They had had the advantage of seeing the bodies and examining them, and though they found themselves confronted with signs which were in themselves significant, they could not read them. All that I had to go upon was hearsay, and I was asked to solve a mystery which seemed unsolvable. But, as I have so often stated in the course of my chronicles, the seemingly impossible is frequently the most easy to accomplish, where a mind specially trained to deal with complex problems is brought to bear upon it.

In interviewing Mr. Tuscan Trankler, I found that he entertained a very decided opinion that there had been foul play, though he admitted that it was difficult in the extreme to suggest even a vague notion of how the deed had been accomplished. If the two men had died together or within a short period of each other, the idea of murder would have seemed more logical. But two years had elapsed, and yet each man had evidently died from precisely the same cause. Therefore, if it *was* murder, the same hand that had slain Mr. Charnworth slew Mr. Trankler. There was no getting away from that; and then of course arose the question of *motive*. Granted that the same hand did the deed, did the same motive prompt in each case?

Another aspect of the affair that presented itself to me was that the crime, if crime it was, was not the work of any ordinary person. There was an originality of conception in it which pointed to the criminal being in certain respects—a genius. And, moreover, the motive underlying it must have been a very powerful one; possibly, nay probably, due to a sense of some terrible wrong inflicted, and which could only be wiped out with the death of the wronger. But this presupposed that each man, though unrelated, had perpetrated the same wrong. Now, it was within the grasp of intelligent reasoning that Charnworth, in his capacity of a county justice, might have given mortal offence to some one, who, cherishing the memory of it, until a mania had been set up, resolved that the magistrate should die. That theory was reasonable when taken singly, but it seemed to lose its reasonableness when connected with young Trankler, unless it was that he had been instrumental in getting somebody convicted. To determine this I made very pointed inquiries, but received the most positive assurances that never in the whole course of his life had he directly or indirectly been instrumental in prosecuting any one. Therefore, so far as he was concerned, the theory fell to the ground; and if the same person killed both men, the motive prompting in each case was a different one, assuming that Charnworth's death resulted from revenge for a fancied wrong inflicted in the course of his administration of justice.

Although I fully recognized all the difficulties that lay in the way of a rational deduction that would square in with the theory of murder, and of murder committed by one and the same hand, I saw how necessary it was to keep in view the points I have



advanced as factors in the problem that had to be worked out, and I adhered to my first impression, and felt tolerably certain that, granted the men had been murdered, they were murdered by the same hand. It may be said that this deduction required no great mental effort. I admit that that is so; but it is strange that nearly all the people in the district were opposed to the theory. Mr. Tuscan Trankler spoke very highly of Charnworth. He believed him to be an upright, conscientious man, liberal to a fault with his means, and in his position of magistrate erring on the side of mercy. In his private character he was a *bon vivant*; fond of a good dinner, good wine, and good company. He was much in request at dinner-parties and other social gatherings, for he was accounted a brilliant *raconteur*, possessed of an endless fund of racy jokes and anecdotes. I have already stated that with ladies he was an especial favourite, for he had a singularly suave, winning way, which with most women was irresistible. In age he was more than double that of young Trankler, who was only five and twenty at the time of his death, whereas Charnworth had turned sixty, though I was given to understand that he was a well-preserved, good-looking man, and apparently younger than he really was.

Coming to young Trankler, there was a consensus of opinion that he was an exemplary young man. He had been partly educated at home and partly at the Manchester Grammar School; and, though he had shown a decided talent for engineering, he had not gone in for it seriously, but had dabbled in it as an amateur, for he had ample means and good prospects, and it was his father's desire that he should lead the life of a country gentleman, devote himself to country

pursuits, and to improving and keeping together the family estates. To the lady who was to have become his bride, he had been engaged but six months, and had only known her a year. His premature and mysterious death had caused intense grief in both families; and his intended wife had been so seriously affected that her friends had been compelled to take her abroad.

With these facts and particulars before me, I had to set to work and try to solve the problem which was considered unsolvable by most of the people who knew anything about it. But may I be pardoned for saying very positively that, even at this point, I did not consider it so. Its complexity could not be gainsaid; nevertheless, I felt that there were ways and means of arriving at a solution, and I set to work in my own fashion. Firstly, I started on the assumption that both men had been deliberately murdered by the same person. If that was not so, then they had died of some remarkable and unknown disease which had stricken them down under a set of conditions that were closely allied, and the coincidence in that case would be one of the most astounding the world had ever known. Now, if that was correct, a pathological conundrum was propounded which it was for the medical world to answer, and practically I was placed out of the running, to use a sporting phrase. I found that, with few exceptions—the exceptions being Mr. Trankler and his friends—there was an undisguised opinion that what the united local wisdom and skill had failed to accomplish, could not be accomplished by a stranger. As my experience, however, had inured me against that sort of thing, it did not affect me. Local prejudices and jealousies have always to be reckoned with, and

it does not do to be thin-skinned. I worked upon my own lines, thought with my own thoughts, and, as an expert in the art of reading human nature, I reasoned from a different set of premises to that employed by the irresponsible chatterers, who cry out "Impossible," as soon as the first difficulty presents itself. Marshalling all the facts of the case, so far as I had been able to gather them, I arrived at the conclusion that the problem could be solved, and, as a preliminary step to that end, I started off to London, much to the astonishment of those who had secured my services. But my reply to the many queries addressed to me was, "I hope to find the key-note to the solution in the metropolis." This reply only increased the astonishment, but later on I will explain why I took the step, which may seem to the reader rather an extraordinary one.

After an absence of five days I returned to Cheshire, and I was then in a position to say, "Unless a miracle has happened, Charnworth and Trankler were murdered beyond all doubt, and murdered by the same person in such a cunning, novel, and devilish manner, that even the most astute inquirer might have been pardoned for being baffled." Of course there was a strong desire to know my reasons for the positive statement, but I felt that it was in the interests of justice itself that I should not allow them to be known at that stage of the proceedings.

The next important step was to try and find out what had become of Miss Downie, the Knutsford beauty, with whom Charnworth was said to have carried on a flirtation. Here, again, I considered secrecy of great importance.

Hester Downie was about seven and twenty years

of age. She was an orphan, and was believed to have been born in Macclesfield, as her parents came from there. Her father's calling was that of a miller. He had settled in Knutsford about fifteen years previous to the period I am dealing with, and had been dead five years. Not very much was known about the family, but it was thought there were other children living. No very kindly feeling was shown for Hester Downie, though it was only too obvious that jealousy was at the bottom of it. Half the young men, it seemed, had lost their heads about her, and all the girls in the village were consumed with envy and jealousy. It was said she was "stuck up," "above her position," "a heartless flirt," and so forth. From those competent to speak, however, she was regarded as a nice young woman, and admittedly good-looking. For years she had lived with an old aunt, who bore the reputation of being rather a sullen sort of woman, and somewhat eccentric. The girl had a little over fifty pounds a year to live upon, derived from a small property left to her by her father; and she and her aunt occupied a cottage just on the outskirts of Knutsford. Hester was considered to be very exclusive, and did not associate much with the people in Knutsford. This was sufficient to account for the local bias, and as she often went away from her home for three and four weeks at a time, it was not considered extraordinary when it was known that she had left soon after Trankler's death. Nobody, however, knew where she had gone to; it is right, perhaps, that I should here state that not a soul breathed a syllable of suspicion against her, that either directly or indirectly she could be connected with the deaths of Charnworth or Trankler. The aunt, a widow by the name of

Hislop, could not be described as a pleasant or genial woman, either in appearance or manner. I was anxious to ascertain for certain whether there was any truth in the rumour or not that Miss Downie had flirted with Mr. Charnworth. If it was true that she did, a clue might be afforded which would lead to the ultimate unravelling of the mystery. I had to approach Mrs. Hislop with a good deal of circumspection, for she showed an inclination to resent any inquiries being made into her family matters. She gave me the impression that she was an honest woman, and it was very apparent that she was strongly attached to her niece Hester. Trading on this fact, I managed to draw her out. I said that people in the district were beginning to say unkind things about Hester, and that it would be better for the girl's sake that there should be no mystery associated with her or her movements.

The old lady fired up at this, and declared that she didn't care a jot about what the "common people" said. Her niece was superior to all of them, and she would "have the law of any one who spoke ill of Hester."

"But there is one thing, Mrs. Hislop," I replied, "that ought to be set at rest. It is rumoured—in fact, something more than rumoured—that your niece and the late Mr. Charnworth were on terms of intimacy, which, to say the least, if it is true, was imprudent for a girl in her position."

"Them what told you that," exclaimed the old woman, "is like the adders the woodmen get in Delamere forest; they're full of pisen. Mr. Charnworth courted the girl fair and square, and led her to believe he would marry her. But, of course, he had

to do the thing in secret. Some folk will talk so, and if it had been known that a gentleman like Mr. Charnworth was coming after a girl in Hester's position, all sorts of things would have been said."

"Did she believe that he was serious in his intentions towards her?"

"Of course she did."

"Why was the match broken off?"

"Because he died."

"Then do you mean to tell me seriously, Mrs. Hislop, that Mr. Charnworth, had he lived, would have married your niece?"

"Yes, I believe he would."

"Was he the only lover the girl had?"

"Oh dear no. She used to carry on with a man named Job Panton. But, though they were engaged to be married, she didn't like him much, and threw him up for Mr. Charnworth."

"Did she ever flirt with young Mr. Trankler?"

"I don't know about flirting; but he called here now and again, and made her some presents. You see, Hester is a superior sort of girl, and I don't wonder at gentlefolk liking her."

"Just so," I replied; "beauty attracts peasant and lord alike. But you will understand that it is to Hester's interest that there should be no concealment—no mystery; and I advise that she return here, for her very presence would tend to silence the tongue of scandal. By the way, where is she?"

"She's staying in Manchester with a relative, a cousin of hers, named Jessie Turner."

"Is Jessie Turner a married woman?"

"Oh yes; well, that is, she has been married; but she's a widow now, and has two little children. She is very fond of Hester, who often goes to her."

Having obtained Jessie Turner's address in Manchester, I left Mrs. Hislop, feeling somehow as if I had got the key of the problem, and a day or two later I called on Mrs. Jessie Turner, who resided in a small house, situated in Tamworth Street, Hulme, Manchester.

She was a young woman, not more than thirty years of age, somewhat coarse, and vulgar-looking in appearance, and with an unpleasant, self-assertive manner. There was a great contrast between her and her cousin, Hester Downie, who was a remarkably attractive and pretty girl, with quite a classical figure, and a childish, winning way, but a painful want of education which made itself very manifest when she spoke; and a harsh, unmusical voice detracted a good deal from her winsomeness, while in everything she did, and almost everything she said, she revealed that vanity was her besetting sin.

I formed my estimate at once of this young woman,—indeed, of both of them. Hester seemed to me to be shallow, vain, thoughtless, giddy; and her companion, artful, cunning, and heartless.

"I want you, Miss Downie," I began, "to tell me truthfully the story of your connection, firstly, with Job Panton; secondly, with Mr. Charnworth; thirdly, with Mr. Trankler."

This request caused the girl to fall into a condition of amazement and confusion, for I had not stated what the nature of my business was, and, of course, she was unprepared for the question.

"What should I tell you my business for?" she cried snappishly, and growing very red in the face.

"You are aware," I remarked, "that both Mr. Charnworth and Mr. Trankler are dead?"

"Of course I am."

"Have you any idea how they came by their death?"

"Not the slightest."

"Will you be surprised to hear that some very hard things are being said about you?"

"About me!" she exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes."

"Why about me?"

"Well—your disappearance from your home, for one thing."

She threw up her hands and uttered a cry of distress and horror, while sudden paleness took the place of the red flush that had dyed her cheeks. Then she burst into almost hysterical weeping, and sobbed out—

"I declare it's awful. To think that I cannot do any thing or go away when I like without all the old cats in the place trying to blacken my character! It's a pity that people won't mind their own business, and not go out of the way to talk about that which doesn't concern them."

"But, you see, Miss Downie, it's the way of the world," I answered, with a desire to soothe her; "one mustn't be too thin-skinned. Human nature is essentially spiteful. However, to return to the subject, you will see, perhaps, the importance of answering my questions. The circumstances of Charnworth's and Trankler's deaths are being closely inquired into, and I am sure you wouldn't like it to be thought that you were withholding information which, in the interest of law and justice, might be valuable."

"Certainly not," she replied, suppressing a sob. "But I have nothing to tell you."

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"But you knew the three men I have mentioned."

"Of course I did, but Job Panton is an ass. I never could bear him."

"He was your sweetheart, though, was he not?"

"He used to come fooling about, and declared that he couldn't live without me."

"Did you never give him encouragement?"

"I suppose every girl makes a fool of herself sometimes."

"Then you did allow him to sweetheart you?"

"If you like to call it sweethearting you can," she answered, with a toss of her pretty head. "I did walk out with him sometimes. But I didn't care much for him. You see, he wasn't my sort at all."

"In what way?"

"Well, surely I couldn't be expected to marry a gamekeeper, could I?"

"He is a gamekeeper, then?"

"Yes."

"In whose employ is he?"

"Lord Belmere's."

"Was he much disappointed when he found that you would have nothing to do with him?"

"I really don't know. I didn't trouble myself about him," she answered, with a coquettish heartlessness.

"Did you do any sweethearting with Mr. Trankler?"

"No, of course not. He used to be very civil to me, and talk to me when he met me."

"Did you ever walk out with him?"

The question brought the colour back to her face, and her manner grew confused again.

"Once or twice I met him by accident, and he trolled along the road with me—that's all."

This answer was not a truthful one. Of that I was convinced by her very manner. But I did not betray my mistrust or doubts. I did not think there was any purpose to be served in so doing. So far the object of my visit was accomplished, and as Miss Downie seemed disposed to resent any further questioning, I thought it was advisable to bring the interview to a close; but before doing so, I said—

“I have one more question to ask you, Miss Downie. Permit me to preface it, however, by saying I am afraid that, up to this point, you have failed to appreciate the situation, or grasp the seriousness of the position in which you are placed. Let me, therefore, put it before you in a somewhat more graphic way. Two men—gentlemen of good social position—with whom you seem to have been well acquainted, and whose attentions you encouraged—pray do not look at me so angrily as that; I mean what I say. I repeat that you encouraged their attentions, otherwise they would not have gone after you.” Here Miss Downie’s nerves gave way again, and she broke into a fit of weeping, and, holding her handkerchief to her eyes, she exclaimed with almost passionate bitterness—

“Well, whatever I did, I was egged on to do it by my cousin, Jessie Turner. She always said I was a fool not to aim at high game.”

“And so you followed her promptings, and really thought that you might have made a match with Mr. Charnworth; but, he having died, you turned your thoughts to young Trankler.” She did not reply, but sobbed behind her handkerchief. So I proceeded. “Now the final question I want to ask you is this: Have you ever had any one who has made serious love to you but Job Panton?”

"Mr. Charnworth made love to me," she sobbed out.

"He flirted with you," I suggested.

"No; he made love to me," she persisted. "He promised to marry me."

"And you believed him?"

"Of course I did."

"Did Trankler promise to marry you?"

"No."

"Then I must repeat my question, but will add Mr. Charnworth's name. Besides him and Panton, is there any one else in existence who has courted you in the hope that you would become his wife?"

"No—no one," she mumbled in a broken voice.

As I took my departure I felt that I had gathered up a good many threads, though they wanted arranging, and, so to speak, classifying; that done, they would probably give me the clue I was seeking. One thing was clear, Miss Downie was a weak-headed, giddy, flighty girl, incapable, as it seemed to me, of seriously reflecting on anything. Her cousin was crafty and shallow, and a dangerous companion for Downie, who was sure to be influenced and led by a creature like Jessie Turner. But, let it not be inferred from these remarks that I had any suspicion that either of the two women had in any way been accessory to the crime, for crime I was convinced it was. Trankler and Charnworth had been murdered, but by whom I was not prepared to even hint at at that stage of the proceedings. The two unfortunate gentlemen had, beyond all possibility of doubt, both been attracted by the girl's exceptionally good looks, and they had amused themselves with her. This fact suggested at once the question, Was Charnworth in the habit of seeing her before Trankler made her

acquaintance? Now, if my theory of the crime was correct, it could be asserted with positive certainty that Charnworth was the girl's lover before Trankler. Of course it was almost a foregone conclusion that Trankler must have been aware of her existence for a long time. The place, be it remembered, was small; she, in her way, was a sort of local celebrity, and it was hardly likely that young Trankler was ignorant of some of the village gossip in which she figured. But, assuming that he was, he was well acquainted with Charnworth, who was looked upon in the neighbourhood as "a gay dog." The female conquests of such men are often matters of notoriety; though, even if that was not the case, it was likely enough that Charnworth may have discussed Miss Downie in Trankler's presence. Some men—especially those of Charnworth's characteristics—are much given to boasting of their flirtations, and Charnworth may have been rather proud of his ascendancy over the simple village beauty. Of course, all this, it will be said, was mere theorizing. So it was; but it will presently be seen how it squared in with the general theory of the whole affair, which I had worked out after much pondering, and a careful weighing and nice adjustment of all the evidence, such as it was, I had been able to gather together, and the various parts which were necessary before the puzzle could be put together.

It was immaterial, however, whether Trankler did or did not know Hester Downie before or at the same time as Charnworth. A point that was not difficult to determine was this—he did not make himself conspicuous as her admirer until after his friend's death, probably not until some time afterwards. Otherwise, how came it about that the slayer of Charnworth

waited two years before he took the life of young Trankler? The reader will gather from this remark how my thoughts ran at that time. Firstly, I was clearly of opinion that both men had been murdered. Secondly, the murder in each case was the outcome of jealousy. Thirdly, the murderer must, as a logical sequence, have been a rejected suitor. This would point necessarily to Job Panton as the criminal, assuming my information was right that the girl had not had any other lover. But against that theory this very strong argument could be used: By what extraordinary and secret means—means that had baffled all the science of the district—had Job Panton, who occupied the position of a gamekeeper, been able to do away with his victims, and bring about death so horrible and so sudden as to make one shudder to think of it? Herein was displayed a devilishness of cunning, and a knowledge which it was difficult to conceive that an ignorant and untravelled man was likely to be in possession of. Logic, deduction, and all the circumstances of the case were opposed to the idea of Panton being the murderer at the first blush; and yet, so far as I had gone, I had been irresistibly drawn towards the conclusion that Panton was either directly or indirectly responsible for the death of the two gentlemen. But, in order to know something more of the man whom I suspected, I disguised myself as a travelling showman on the lookout for a good pitch for my show, and I took up my quarters for a day or two at a rustic inn just on the skirts of Knutsford, and known as the Woodman. I had previously ascertained that this inn was a favourite resort of the gamekeepers for miles round about, and Job Panton was to be found there almost nightly.

In a short time I had made his acquaintance. He was a young, big-limbed, powerful man, of a pronounced rustic type. He had the face of a gipsy—swarthy and dark, with keen, small black eyes, and a mass of black curly hair, and in his ears he wore tiny, plain gold rings. Singularly enough his expression was most intelligent; but allied with—as it seemed to me—a certain suggestiveness of latent ferocity. That is to say, I imagined him liable to outbursts of temper and passion, during which he might be capable of anything. As it was, then, he seemed to me subdued, somewhat sullen, and averse to conversation. He smoked heavily, and I soon found that he guzzled beer at a terrible rate. He had received, for a man in his position, a tolerably good education. By that I mean he could write a fair hand, he read well, and had something more than a smattering of arithmetic. I was told also that he was exceedingly skilful with carpenter's tools, although he had had no training that way; he also understood something about plants, while he was considered an authority on the habits, and everything appertaining to game. The same informant thought to still further enlighten me by adding—

“Poor Joe beän't the chap he wur a year or more ago. His gal cut un, and that kind a took a hold on un. He doän't say much; but it wur a terrible blow, it wur.”

“How was it his girl cut him?” I asked.

“Well, you see, meäster, it wur this way; she thought hersel' a bit too high for un. Mind you, I bäan't a saying as she wur; but when a gal thinks hersel' above a chap, it's no use talking to her.”

“What was the girl's name?”

"They call her Downie. Her father was a miller here in Knutsford, but his gal had too big notions of hersel'; and she chucked poor Joe Panton overboard, and they do say as how she took on wi' Meäster Charnworth and also wi' Meäster Trankler. I doän't know nowt for certain myself, but there wur some rum kind o' talk going about. Leastwise, I know that Joe took it badly, and he ain't been the same kind o' chap since. But there, what's the use a breaking one's 'art about a gal? Gals is a queer lot, I tell you. My old grandfaither used to say, 'Women folk be curious folk. They be necessary evils, they be, and pleasant enough in their way, but a chap mustn't let 'em get the upper hand. They're like harses, they be, and if you want to manage 'em, you must show 'em you're their meäster.'"

The garrulous gentleman who entertained me thus with his views on women, was a tough, sinewy, weather-tanned old codger, who had lived the allotted span according to the psalmist, but who seemed destined to tread the earth for a long time still; for his seventy years had neither bowed nor shrunk him. His chatter was interesting to me because it served to prove what I already suspected, which was that Joe Panton had taken his jilting very seriously indeed. Joe was by no means a communicative fellow. As a matter of fact, it was difficult to draw him out on any subject; and though I should have liked to have heard *his* views about Hester Downie, I did not feel warranted in tapping him straight off. I very speedily discovered, however, that his weakness was beer. His capacity for it seemed immeasurable. He soaked himself with it; but when he reached the muddled stage, there was a tendency on his part to

be more loquacious, and, taking advantage at last of one of these opportunities, I asked him one night if he had travelled. The question was an exceedingly pertinent one to my theory, and I felt that to a large extent the theory I had worked out depended upon the answer he gave. He turned his beady eyes upon me, and said, with a sort of sardonic grin—

“Yes, I’ve travelled a bit in my time, meäster. I’ve been to Manchester often, and I once tramped all the way to Edinburgh. I had to rough it, I tell thee.”

“Yes, I dare say,” I answered. “But what I mean is, have you ever been abroad? Have you ever been to sea?”

“No, meäster, not me.”

“You’ve never been in foreign countries?”

“No. I’ve never been out of this one. England was good enough for me. But I would like to go away now to Australia, or some of those places.”

“Why?”

“Well, meäster, I have my own reasons.”

“Doubtless,” I said, “and no doubt very sound reasons.”

“Never thee mind whether they are, or whether they beän’t,” he retorted warmly. “All I’ve got to say is, I wouldn’t care where I went to if I could only get far enough away from this place. I’m tired of it.”

In the manner of giving his answer, he betrayed the latent fire which I had surmised, and showed that there was a volcanic force of passion underlying his sullen silence, for he spoke with a suppressed force which clearly indicated the intensity of his feelings, and his bright eyes grew brighter with the emotion he felt. I now ventured upon another remark. I intended it to be a test one.



"I heard one of your mates say that you had been jilted. I suppose that's why you hate the place?"

He turned upon me suddenly. His tanned, ruddy face took on a deeper flush of red; his upper teeth closed almost savagely on his nether lip; his chest heaved, and his great, brawny hands clenched with the working of his passion. Then, with one great bang of his ponderous fist, he struck the table until the pots and glasses on it jumped as if they were sentient and frightened; and in a voice thick with smothered passion, he growled, "Yes, damn her! She's been my ruin."

"Nonsense!" I said. "You are a young man, and a young man should not talk about being ruined because a girl has jilted him."

Once more he turned that angry look upon me, and said fiercely—

"Thou knows nowt about it, governor. Thou're a stranger to me; and I doän't allow no strangers to preach to me. So shut up! I'll have nowt more to say to thee."

There was a peremptoriness, a force of character, and a display of firmness and self-assurance in his tone and manner, which stamped him with a distinct individualism, and made it evident that in his own particular way he was distinct from the class in which his lot was cast. He, further than that, gave me the idea that he was designing and secretive; and given that he had been educated and well trained, he might have made his mark in the world. My interview with him had been instructive, and my opinion that he might prove a very important factor in working out the problem was strengthened; but

at that stage of the inquiry I would not have taken upon myself to say, with anything like definiteness, that he was directly responsible for the death of the two gentlemen, whose mysterious ending had caused such a profound sensation. But the reader of this narrative will now see for himself that of all men, so far as one could determine then, who might have been interested in the death of Mr. Charnworth and Mr. Trankler, Job Panton stood out most conspicuously. His motive for destroying them was one of the most powerful of human passions—namely, jealousy, which in his case was likely to assume a very violent form, inasmuch as there was no evenly balanced judgment, no capability of philosophical reasoning, calculated to restrain the fierce, crude passion of the determined and self-willed man.

A wounded tiger is fiercer and more dangerous than an unwounded one, and an ignorant and unreasoning man is far more likely to be led to excess by a sense of wrong, than one who is capable of reflecting and moralizing. Of course, if I had been the impossible detective of fiction, endowed with the absurd attributes of being able to tell the story of a man's life from the way the tip of his nose was formed, or the number of hairs on his head, or by the shape and size of his teeth, or the way he held his pipe when smoking, or from the kind of liquor he consumed, or the hundred and one utterly ridiculous and burlesque signs which are so easily read by the detective prig of modern creation, I might have come to a different conclusion with reference to Job Panton. But my work had to be carried out on very different lines, and I had to be guided by certain deductive inferences, aided by an intimate knowledge of human nature,

and of the laws which, more or less in every case of crime, govern the criminal.

I have already set forth my unalterable opinion that Charnworth and Trankler had been murdered; and so far as I had proceeded up to this point, I had heard and seen enough to warrant me, in my own humble judgment, in at least suspecting Job Panton of being guilty of the murder. But there was one thing that puzzled me greatly. When I first commenced my inquiries, and was made acquainted with all the extraordinary medical aspects of the case, I argued with myself that if it *was* murder, it was murder carried out upon very original lines. Some potent, swift and powerful poison must have been suddenly and secretly introduced into the blood of the victim. The bite of a cobra, or of the still more fearful and deadly Fer de lance of the West Indies, might have produced symptoms similar to those observed in the two men; but happily our beautiful and quiet woods and gardens of England are not infested with these deadly reptiles, and one had to search for the causes elsewhere. Now every one knows that the notorious Lucrezia Borgia, and the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, made use of means for accomplishing the death of those whom they were anxious to get out of the way, which were at once effective and secret. These means consisted, amongst others, of introducing into the blood of the intended victim some subtle poison, by the medium of a scratch or puncture. This little and fatal wound could be given by the scratch of a pin, or the sharpened stone of a ring, and in such a way that the victim would be all unconscious of it until the deadly poison so insidiously introduced began to course through his veins, and to sap the

props of his life. With these facts in my mind, I asked myself if in the Dead Wood Hall tragedies some similar means had been used; and in order to have competent and authoritative opinion to guide me, I journeyed back to London to consult the eminent chemist and scientist, Professor Lucraft. This gentleman had made a lifelong study of the toxic effect of ptomaines on the human system, and of the various poisons used by savage tribes for tipping their arrows and spears. Enlightened as he was on the subject, he confessed that there were hundreds of these deadly poisons, of which the modern chemist knew absolutely nothing; but he expressed a decided opinion that there were many that would produce all the effects and symptoms observable in the case of Charnworth and Trankler. And he particularly instanced some of the herbal extracts used by various tribes of Indians, who wander in the interior of the little known country of Ecuador, and he cited as an authority Mr. Hart Thompson, the botanist, who travelled from Quito right through Ecuador to the Amazons. This gentleman reported that he found a vegetable poison in use by the natives for poisoning the tips of their arrows and spears of so deadly and virulent a nature, that a scratch even on a panther would bring about the death of the animal within an hour.

Armed with these facts, I returned to Cheshire, and continued my investigations on the assumption that some such deadly destroyer of life had been used to put Charnworth and Trankler out of the way. But necessarily I was led to question whether or not it was likely that an untravelled and ignorant man like Job Panton could have known anything about

such poisons and their uses. This was a stumbling-block; and while I was convinced that Panton had a strong motive for the crime, I was doubtful if he could have been in possession of the means for committing it. At last, in order to try and get evidence on this point, I resolved to search the place in which he lived. He had for a long time occupied lodgings in the house of a widow woman in Knutsford, and I subjected his rooms to a thorough and critical search, but without finding a sign of anything calculated to justify my suspicion.

I freely confess that at this stage I began to feel that the problem was a hopeless one, and that I should fail to work it out. My depression, however, did not last long. It was not my habit to acknowledge defeat so long as there were probabilities to guide me, so I began to make inquiries about Panton's relatives, and these inquiries elicited the fact that he had been in the habit of making frequent journeys to Manchester to see an uncle. I soon found that this uncle had been a sailor, and had been one of a small expedition which had travelled through Peru and Ecuador in search of gold. Now, this was a discovery indeed, and the full value of it will be understood when it is taken in connection with the information given to me by Professor Lucraft. Let us see how it works out logically.

Panton's uncle was a sailor and a traveller. He had travelled through Peru, and been into the interior of Ecuador.

Panton was in the habit of visiting his uncle.

Could the uncle have wandered through Ecuador without hearing something of the marvellous poisons used by the natives?

Having been connected with an exploring expedition, it was reasonable to assume that he was a man of good intelligence, and of an inquiring turn of mind.

Equally probable was it that he had brought home some of the deadly poisons or poisoned implements used by the Indians. Granted that, and what more likely than that he talked of his knowledge and possessions to his nephew? The nephew, brooding on his wrongs, and seeing the means within his grasp of secretly avenging himself on those whom he counted his rivals, he obtained the means from his uncle's collection of putting his rivals to death, in a way which to him would seem to be impossible to detect. I had seen enough of Panton to feel sure that he had all the intelligence and cunning necessary for planning and carrying out the deed.

A powerful link in the chain of evidence had now been forged, and I proceeded a step further. After a consultation with the chief inspector of police, who, however, by no means shared my views, I applied for a warrant for Panton's arrest, although I saw that to establish legal proof of his guilt would be extraordinarily difficult, for his uncle at that time was at sea, somewhere in the southern hemisphere. Moreover, the whole case rested upon such a hypothetical basis, that it seemed doubtful whether, even supposing a magistrate would commit, a jury would convict. But I was not daunted; and, having succeeded so far in giving a practical shape to my theory, I did not intend to draw back. So I set to work to endeavour to discover the weapon which had been used for wounding Charnworth and Trankler, so that the poison might take effect. This, of course, was the *crux* of the whole affair. The discovery of the medium by which the

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death-scratch was given would forge almost the last link necessary to ensure a conviction.

Now, in each case there was pretty conclusive evidence that there had been no struggle. This fact justified the belief that the victim was struck silently, and probably unknown to himself. What were the probabilities of that being the case? Assuming that Panton was guilty of the crime, how was it that he, being an inferior, was allowed to come within striking distance of his victims? The most curious thing was that both men had been scratched on the left side of the neck. Charnworth had been killed in his friend's garden on a summer night. Trankler had fallen in mid-day in the depths of a forest. There was an interval of two years between the death of the one man and the death of the other, yet each had a scratch on the left side of the neck. That could not have been a mere coincidence. It was design.

The next point for consideration was, how did Panton—always assuming that he was the criminal—get access to Mr. Trankler's grounds? Firstly, the grounds were extensive, and in connection with a plantation of young fir trees. When Charnworth was found, he was lying behind a clump of rhododendron bushes, and near where the grounds were merged into the plantation, a somewhat dilapidated oak fence separating the two. These details before us make it clear that Panton could have had no difficulty in gaining access to the plantation, and thence to the grounds. But how came it that he was there just at the time that Charnworth was strolling about? It seemed stretching a point very much to suppose that he could have been loafing about on the mere chance of seeing Charnworth. And the only hypothesis that squared in with

intelligent reasoning, was that the victim had been lured into the grounds. But this necessarily presupposed a confederate. Close inquiry elicited the fact that Panton was in the habit of going to the house. He knew most of the servants, and frequently accompanied young Trankler on his shooting excursions, and periodically he spent half a day or so in the gun room at the house, in order that he might clean up all the guns, for which he was paid a small sum every month. These circumstances cleared the way of difficulties to a very considerable extent. I was unable, however, to go beyond that, for I could not ascertain the means that had been used to lure Mr. Charnworth into the garden—if he had been lured; and I felt sure that he had been. But so much had to remain for the time being a mystery.

Having obtained the warrant to arrest Panton, I proceeded to execute it. He seemed thunderstruck when told that he was arrested on a charge of having been instrumental in bringing about the death of Charnworth and Trankler. For a brief space of time he seemed to collapse, and lose his presence of mind. But suddenly, with an apparent effort, he recovered himself, and said, with a strange smile on his face—

“You’ve got to prove it, and that you can never do.”

His manner and this remark were hardly compatible with innocence, but I clearly recognized the difficulties of proof.

From that moment the fellow assumed a self-assured air, and to those with whom he was brought in contact he would remark—

“I’m as innocent as a lamb, and them as says I done the deed have got to prove it.”



In my endeavour to get further evidence to strengthen my case, I managed to obtain from Job Pantan's uncle's brother, who followed the occupation of an engine-minder in a large cotton factory in Oldham, an old chest containing a quantity of lumber. The uncle, on going to sea again, had left this chest in charge of his brother. A careful examination of the contents proved that they consisted of a very miscellaneous collection of odds and ends, including two or three small, carved wooden idols from some savage country; some stone weapons, such as are used by the North American Indians; strings of cowrie shell, a pair of mocassins, feathers of various kinds; a few dried specimens of strange birds; and last, though not least, a small bamboo case containing a dozen tiny sharply pointed darts, feathered at the thick end; while in a stone box, about three inches square, was a viscid thick gummy looking substance of a very dark brown colour, and giving off a sickening and most disagreeable, though faint odour. These things I at once submitted to Professor Lucraft, who expressed an opinion that the gummy substance in the stone box was a vegetable poison, used probably to poison the darts with. He lost no time in experimentalizing with this substance, as well as with the darts. With these darts he scratched guinea-pigs, rabbits, a dog, a cat, a hen, and a young pig, and in each case death ensued in periods of time ranging from a quarter of an hour to two hours. By means of a subcutaneous injection into a rabbit of a minute portion of the gummy substance, about the size of a pea, which had been thinned with alcohol, he produced death in exactly seven minutes. A small monkey was next procured, and slightly scratched on the

neck with one of the poisoned darts. In a very short time the poor animal exhibited the most distressing symptoms, and in half an hour it was dead, and a post-mortem examination revealed many of the peculiar effects which had been observed in Charnworth's and Trankler's bodies. Various other exhaustive experiments were carried out, all of which confirmed the deadly nature of these minute poison-darts, which could be puffed through a hollow tube to a great distance, and after some practice, with unerring aim. Analysis of the gummy substance in the box proved it to be a violent vegetable poison; innocuous when swallowed, but singularly active and deadly when introduced direct into the blood.

On the strength of these facts, the magistrate duly committed Job Panton to take his trial at the next assizes, on a charge of murder, although there was not a scrap of evidence forthcoming to prove that he had ever been in possession of any of the darts or the poison; and unless such evidence was forthcoming, it was felt that the case for the prosecution must break down, however clear the mere guilt of the man might seem.

In due course, Panton was put on his trial at Chester, and the principal witness against him was Hester Downie, who was subjected to a very severe cross-examination, which left not a shadow of a doubt that she and Panton had at one time been close sweet-hearts. But her cousin Jessie Turner proved a tempter of great subtlety. It was made clear that she poisoned the girl's mind against her humble lover. Although it could not be proved, it is highly probable that Jessie Turner was a creature of and in the pay of Mr. Charnworth, who seemed to have been very much attracted

by him. Her connection with Charnworth half maddened Panton, who made frantic appeals to her to be true to him, appeals to which she turned a deaf ear. That Trankler knew her in Charnworth's time was also brought out, and after Charnworth's death she smiled favourably on the young man. On the morning that Trankler's shooting-party went out to Mere Forest, Panton was one of the beaters employed by the party.

So much was proved ; so much was made as clear as daylight, and it opened the way for any number of inferences. But the last and most important link was never forthcoming. Panton was defended by an able and unscrupulous counsel, who urged with tremendous force on the notice of the jury, that firstly, not one of the medical witnesses would undertake to swear that the two men had died from the effects of poison similar to that found in the old chest which had belonged to the prisoner's uncle ; and secondly, there was not one scrap of evidence tending to prove that Panton had ever been in possession of poisoned darts, or had ever had access to the chest in which they were kept. These two points were also made much of by the learned judge in his summing up. He was at pains to make clear that there was a doubt involved, and that mere inference ought not to be allowed to outweigh the doubt when a human being was on trial for his life. Although circumstantially the evidence very strongly pointed to the probability of the prisoner having killed both men, nevertheless, in the absence of the strong proof which the law demanded, the way was opened for the escape of a suspected man, and it was far better to let the law be cheated of its due, than that an innocent man should suffer.

'At the same time, the judge went on, two gentlemen had met their deaths in a manner which had baffled medical science, and no one was forthcoming who would undertake to say that they had been killed in the manner suggested by the prosecution, and yet it had been shown that the terrible and powerful poison found in the old chest, and which there was reason to believe had been brought from some part of the little known country near the sources of the mighty Amazon, would produce all the effects which were observed in the bodies of Charnworth and Trankler. The chest, furthermore, in which the poison was discovered, was in possession of Panton's uncle. Panton had a powerful motive in the shape of consuming jealousy for getting rid of his more favoured rivals; and though he was one of the shooting-party in Mere Forest on the day that Trankler lost his life, no evidence had been produced to prove that he was on the premises of Dead Wood Hall, on the night that Charnworth died. If, in weighing all these points of evidence, the jury were of opinion the circumstantial evidence was inadequate, then it was their duty to give the prisoner—whose life was in their hands—the benefit of the doubt.

The jury retired, and were absent three long hours, and it became known that they could not agree. Ultimately, they returned into court, and pronounced a verdict of "Not guilty." In Scotland the verdict must and would have been *non proven*.

And so Job Panton went free, but an evil odour seemed to cling about him; he was shunned by his former companions, and many a suspicious glance was directed to him, and many a bated murmur was uttered as he passed by, until in a while he went

forth beyond the seas, to the far wild west, as some said, and his haunts knew him no more.

The mystery is still a mystery; but how near I came to solving the problem of Dead Wood Hall it is for the reader to judge.

## *TRAPPED.*

### A STORY OF A DIAMOND TIARA.

BY no means the least interesting and least complicated riddle that I have been called upon to read was that of a case which happened many years ago. It was interesting from the fact that it illustrated in a forcible manner some of the darker phases of human nature. And it was calculated to produce wonderment in the minds of those who had never made human nature a study, as to why intellect should be so misapplied. The ordinary observer is naturally led to suppose that people who could play and carry out so bold and daring a deed as that I am about to relate, and which necessitated the exercise of no small amount of ingenuity and skill of a high order, would have directed their energies to honest effort. In short, why should men do wrong when by doing right they might gain ever so much more? It is not quite easy to answer that question, except by saying that the human mind is a complex problem which defies all ordinary rules of solution. It is curious and no less sad to reflect that there are men and women who do evil by preference. This may be, due to some hereditary principle, for if virtue can be

transmitted from father to son, it is right to assume that vice may descend in the same way. Of course this opens up a very large question, and much as I am tempted to discuss it—for psychological problems have a fascination for me—I feel I must confine myself in the present instance to a narration of the facts I have marshalled for the interest of my readers.

It appeared that an English merchant who had a very extensive business in Brazil came into possession, either by purchase or discovery, of some magnificent blue diamonds of exceptional beauty and value. Having a high regard for the character of the then Empress of Brazil, he determined to have these diamonds cut, polished, and formed into a tiara to be presented to her Majesty on the occasion of her birthday. As this work could not be satisfactorily carried out in Brazil itself, he placed himself in communication with his friend, the Brazilian consul in Southampton, and that gentleman was requested to make the necessary arrangements to have the tiara manufactured in England. In consequence of this request the consul wrote to Messrs. Prague, Hamblin, and Co., the well-known diamond cutters and manufacturing jewellers, with the result that the firm undertook to polish and set the diamonds in a novel and chaste design, drawings of which were made, submitted to and approved by the merchant in Brazil.

Before the stones were sent to England they were examined and valued by experts, who appraised them in their rough state at a figure between forty and fifty thousand pounds. They added that the diamonds were of a rare colour and perfect of their kind, and when carefully cut and polished and set in gold their value would probably be doubled.

Of course the inevitable paragraph about this business found its way into the papers. It made interesting "copy," and some of the illustrated journals published the design that Messrs. Prague, Hamblin, and Co. had prepared. Altogether, very wide publicity was given to the matter, and much interest aroused, especially amongst the fair sex, many of whom no doubt envied the empress her splendid gift.

In due time the tiara was completed. The work occupied over a year, and the firm, having applied for permission to do so, announced that the magnificent ornament would be on view at their Bond Street establishment; and any one presenting his card would be at liberty to examine it. A chamber was specially prepared for the exhibition, and in the centre of a table, covered with blue velvet, the tiara was exhibited in all its dazzling effulgence. It was placed on a stand, covered over with a glass shade, and above it a lamp was suspended in such a way that the facets of the jewels reflected every point of light with a brilliancy that was superb. The precious bauble attracted a great deal of attention, and press and public alike were unanimous in the opinion that the tiara was well worthy of being worn by an empress. The value put upon it at this time, including the gold that had been used for the setting, was one hundred and twenty thousand pounds. This was an enormous sum, and probably a somewhat exaggerated value, but whatever it was many a person who was privileged to view the thing must have reflected that with only a tithe of that amount in his legitimate possession life would be less burdensome than it then was. Indeed, not a few probably were of opinion that such an enormous sum ought not to be locked up in



a mere trinket, when so many thousands of human beings were dying of hunger and starvation in all the great towns.

The tiara was on view for three days, the last day being a Saturday, and arrangements had been made for its despatch to Brazil by one of the River Plate boats, which was timed to sail on the following Wednesday. The exhibition closed at six o'clock on Saturday evening, and when the visitors had gone the valuable piece of property was removed from the table by the manager, Mr. Van Goldwoort, in the presence of the two principal members of the firm, Prague and Hamblin. It was at once placed in the strong room, which was securely locked, and, all business being over, the premises were closed for the night, and everybody went away.

On Monday morning the manager arrived with the keys, as was his custom, soon after eight o'clock, and was immediately followed by three or four of the shop assistants, and a porter whose duty it was to take down the shutters. As soon as he entered the premises Mr. Goldwoort was alarmed by unmistakable evidence of the place having been surreptitiously entered between then and Saturday night, when it was closed for the week. His first thought was of the strong room, to which he hurried, when he was amazed to see that a circular disc of iron had been clean cut from the door, leaving a hole large enough for a small person to creep through. Goldwoort had not the key of the door. There were only two in existence, and they were kept by the partners, one of whom always brought a key when he arrived about eleven o'clock. As it was only too obvious that burglary had been committed, the police were

immediately communicated with, and a message was despatched post haste to Mr. Hamblin, who resided near Hyde Park. When Hamblin came the iron door was opened, and then, to the horror of every one, it was seen that the magnificent tiara of diamonds intended for the Brazilian empress was missing, together with a tray full of loose precious stones of various sorts, and representing considerable value. But these, of course, were of secondary consideration. The tiara no doubt was what had attracted the thieves, and the other stones had simply been taken because they happened to be temptingly to hand.

The seriousness of the loss to such a firm may be imagined, for apart from the mere monetary value of the stolen article, their reputation was imperilled. They were in the position of bailees, and might be accused of not having taken sufficient precaution to safeguard their precious trust. Naturally the consternation of every one concerned was very great; for there was no one connected with the business but what knew that such a daring theft must have been planned and carried out by experts, by artists in their own particular line of evil-doing. And such people, having successfully accomplished their purpose, were not likely to dally by the way, while, should they succeed, as very likely they had succeeded, in getting out of the country, it would be good-bye for ever to the diamonds. Such was the thought of every one who was not blind to probabilities.

Within an hour of the startling discovery I was on the premises, having been summoned by special messenger. Mr. Prague, who was a very shrewd man, recognized that the most prompt and active measures were necessary, and that every hour's delay was an

advantage to the daring thieves. Before making any investigation I wired to the head of the police in each European capital. In Germany, France, and Holland—particularly in Holland—there are rascals who make a business, and wax fat upon it, of receiving and disposing of precious stones that have been stolen. These men have agents in various parts of the world, and it is comparatively easy to find customers for such property. There was one point I did not overlook in this matter. It was, that owing to the very wide publicity given to the tiara, which had been described in the principal papers of the world, and besides being extensively photographed had been depicted in numerous illustrated journals, it was calculated to make its disposal more difficult than it would have been under different circumstances. At the same time I did not forget that the thieves themselves would probably be quite alive to that also, and had planned their arrangements accordingly.

It did not take long to find out how the premises had been entered. The shop was a very long one, extending from front to back about forty-eight feet. Nearly one-third of this—that is, the back part—was partitioned off, the partition going from floor to ceiling. On each side of the partition was an arched doorway hung with velvet curtains. Behind was the so-called strong room, which in point of fact was a very large safe. A doorway from the shop gave access to another large room, where the offices were situated. Running parallel with the other side of the shop, but having no connection with it whatever, was a passage with entrance from the street. This passage communicated with the upper part of the premises, which had nothing whatever to do with

Prague, Hamblin, and Co. The upper story was in the occupation of a Signor Gracelli and his three daughters. The signor was a teacher of languages; one of his daughters gave instructions in flower-painting, the other two in singing. This family occupied the whole of the upper story. The party wall between the shop and the passage I have described as leading to Signor Gracelli's abode was a double brick wall. In this wall a hole had been broken, and by means of that hole entrance gained to the jewellers' premises. Having regard to the general plan of the building, which I have endeavoured to make clear, it may be said that no other means of entry could have been adopted. Just so. But let us see what it indicated.

Firstly, it pointed to the fact that the plan of the robbery had been very well matured and thought out. It had been no hurriedly conceived plan. The thieves had made themselves acquainted with every detail likely to be of use to them in their enterprise; that was evident. Secondly, it was equally clear that a number of persons had been mixed up in the affair. And this afforded me hope that I should succeed ultimately in bringing them to justice, because where there are numbers it generally happens that a weak one amongst them betrays them by some act or deed sooner or later. I honestly confess, however, that I was not so sanguine about the recovery of the stones, for if they were once passed out of the country they would probably be secreted for a time, and then be conveyed to India or Persia, and there sold. In both India and Persia precious stones are readily disposed of. Now, whoever the people were who had committed the robbery, they were not in the least

likely to be so lacking in intelligence as to offer the proceeds of their daring crime for sale in England, as such a course would have undoubtedly betrayed them into the hands of justice; and in order to find safety for the time they would have to slip away to the Continent.

As one examined into the affair it was clear that an entry had been gained to the passage by means of a duplicate or skeleton key to the street door of Signor Gracelli's residence. Everything had worked in favour of the thieves. Although it was only early in September, Saturday night had been a very stormy one, with drenching rain. After a certain hour at night Bond Street is comparatively deserted, and on a pouring wet night it is remarkably quiet and lonely. The bad weather, of course, was a mere chance that the operators could not have calculated upon; but what they were clearly aware of and had taken into consideration was the absence of the signor and his daughters. For some weeks Signor Gracelli and his family had been in the habit of going away on Saturday about midday to stay until Monday morning with some compatriots of theirs, who were temporarily sojourning in Richmond. But for this absence of the Gracelli family the thieves could not have carried on their work without being discovered. It was very certain, therefore, that the rascals had made themselves acquainted with the fact that the family would be absent, and this strengthened my opinion that the whole affair had been most deliberately planned and carried out in a methodical and business-like way.

The passage wall was a substantial structure. It was two bricks in thickness, and each side was cemented. Operations had been commenced near the

skirting board, and the bricks could only have been dislodged by means of a crowbar. But even then great force must have been used. A hole sufficiently large having been made, the shop was entered, and the burglars were confronted with the more formidable task of gaining access to the safe.

This safe was an old-fashioned one. It had been in its position for upwards of a quarter of a century, and unlike modern safes, which are made of chilled or hardened steel which will resist any attempt to drive or cut it, it was composed of ordinary iron. The dimensions of the door were nine feet three inches by eight, and six inches thick. The key when turned threw twenty bolts, securing the door both at the bottom, top, and at the side. Consequently to have forced it open by means of wedges and jemmies would have been an all but impossible task. It was highly probable that the thieves had also made themselves well acquainted with the construction of the safe or "strong room," as the firm called it, and they therefore did not waste time over fruitless effort. But what they had done was to cut out a circular piece of iron, like the manhole of a boiler, and about the same size. Now this task could only have been accomplished by means of some powerful tool, and that tool must have been a hardened chisel, revolving round a pivot, somewhat on the principle probably of geographical compasses. That tremendous power had been exerted was self-evident, and quantities of oil had been used to keep the machine cool and make it work easy. What struck me as probable was that whatever the nature of the instrument used it had been manufactured specially for the purpose. In this opinion I was supported by an engineer who examined the safe with

me. The disc had been cut out as clean as if it had been a piece of cheese, so that there could be no mistake about the force brought into operation, for the thickness of the iron was, as I have already stated, half a foot. The hole was large enough to admit of a slim man passing through it. This entrance having been made, the rest was easy; and the booty secured, the thieves left the premises the way they had entered, and disappeared very effectually, leaving little behind them likely to prove of value in leading one to pick up their trail. The little so left consisted of a collar and necktie, which had been placed on a chair, and in the hurry of departure forgotten. A gold shirt stud was also picked up from the floor. It was slightly bent, and as it had not formed part of the firm's stock, it had probably dropped from the shirt of one of the criminals. It was of good design, having rayed edges, and a small ruby in the centre. In addition there was a sheet of note-paper covered all over with figures, and a black-lead pencil.

The figures on the paper had no significance as far as I could make out, and I attached no importance to *them*. But there was something else that was of importance, or at any rate seemed so. The collar was a very ordinary one. In size it was sixteen and a half, in shape what was known as a "Hamlet;" it bore the name of a firm in Oxford Street, but nothing else. The stud of course was of far more importance than the collar, but the chances of its leading to a capture appeared very remote; nevertheless, there *was* a chance that it might ultimately prove of service, and so I carefully treasured it. It was somewhat remarkable that although there were thousands of pounds worth of other property in the strong room,

it remained untouched, with the exception of the loose stones of which I have spoken. They were in a velvet-lined tray, such as is used by jewellers for displaying gems in a window; in fact, it had been removed from the window on the Saturday afternoon and placed on a shelf in the safe. Their lustre probably had attracted the thief's notice, and he had swept the contents of the tray into his pocket as unexpected plunder easily removed and easily concealed. Their total value was about three thousand pounds. There were a few small diamonds, some fine rubies, a few pearls, a topaz or two, and several amethysts and emeralds.

So much for the details of the robbery, which were of course soon gathered up. The members of the firm were in a great state of mind, and begged of me to spare neither time nor trouble in my endeavours to recover the stolen tiara. I questioned them very closely to try and find out if they had been struck by any particular person amongst the many who had viewed the tiara during the time it was on exhibition. After some reflection, Mr. Prague said he remembered a tall, gentlemanly looking man being present on two different days. He seemed to take very great interest in the exhibit; but there was nothing apparently suspicious in his movements.

Mr. Goldwoort recollected that about a week or nine days before the exhibition a gentleman entered the shop and asked to look at some diamond pins. Several were shown to him, but nothing that satisfied him, and he went away. From the description of this man he seemed to resemble the one noticed by Prague. When Signor Gracelli was questioned, and heard about the man, he said that from what he gathered



about his appearance he believed the same fellow had called on him a day or two before the exhibition to inquire his terms for lessons in Italian. He promised to return, but never did so.

This bit of information had a certain significance, and pointed to the probability of the man having visited the place on the three different occasions to study the plan of the building. By a careful analysis of the various statements made about the "tall, gentlemanly looking individual," I came to the conclusion that he was the same person who had called to inquire about Italian lessons and to look at the diamond pins. Assuming that this deduction was right, the circumstance was, to say the least, suspicious. He was described as being rather handsome, dark-complexioned, with large full eyes, and a drooping, flowing moustache; and Goldwoort was of opinion that he spoke with a slight foreign accent. Gracelli also asserted that in his man he detected an accent.

I have mentioned that amongst the things left behind by the enterprising gentlemen who had so successfully defied brick wall, bolts, bars, and iron safe, that they had been enabled to carry off property worth a hundred thousand pounds or more, was a sheet of note-paper covered with figures, which were without importance to me, for they might have meant anything. But strangely enough that sheet of paper bore at the top an embossed address, and the address was that of a small west-end hotel. The value of this I neither underrated nor overestimated at the time. Inquiries elicited that the firm knew nothing about the piece of paper; therefore, as it was picked up close to the safe, it was justifiable to suppose it had been inadvertently dropped by one of the uninvited visitors.

That being so, the question arose, how did the person who dropped it come into possession of it? Had he been staying at the hotel in question? If so, it was likely to afford me a clue. I lost no time in going to the hotel to inquire if amongst their recent guests they had one who answered in description to the "tall, gentlemanly looking man" mentioned by Goldwoort and Gracelli. The answer was in the affirmative. Such a man had stayed there for about a fortnight; he was known as "Mr. Ambrose Shedlock," and received a large number of letters in that name. Many of the letters bore foreign postmarks and foreign stamps, but nobody could remember what countries the stamps represented.

Two days after Shedlock's arrival two other men arrived. They were evidently well acquainted with Shedlock, and were believed to be foreigners, though they gave English names, one describing himself as John Smithson, the other as Robert Arkwright. A few days later another man appeared on the scene. He at once joined the trio, to whom it was clear he was well known. He was looked upon as an Englishman. He gave the name of George Fallowfield. These four men dined together, went out together, and seemed on terms of the closest intimacy. They were well supplied with money, lived well, drank the best of wine, smoked the finest cigars, and enjoyed themselves. They were considered by people in the hotel to be men of means and gentlemen.

All this, of course, was very interesting, and save for the slightly suspicious circumstance of the "tall, gentlemanly looking man," there would have been no grounds for supposing that they were other than what they represented themselves to be. But still

that element of suspicion was not to be overlooked. It was the faint sign that suggested a trail. Soon I got a stronger sign. I showed the stud that had been picked up in Prague, Hamblin, and Co.'s shop to the hotel people, and asked if they recognized it. It was passed from one to another; it was examined by the servants, but without result, until a waiter who had always waited on the four gentlemen saw it, when he at once declared that he had seen it before in the shirt front of Mr. Ambrose Shedlock. He was very positive on the point, for he had often been struck by its rayed edge. It was not often shirt studs were worn with edges of that kind, for the reason that the sharp points were apt to cut the button-holes. It was on this account that the waiter's attention was drawn to it.

The importance of the waiter's testimony will at once be apparent. Assuming that he was correct, and there was every reason to suppose that he was, it proved incontestibly that, barring a coincidence that need not be taken into consideration owing to its improbability, Mr. Ambrose Shedlock must have visited Prague, Hamblin, and Co.'s premises on the night of the robbery, and during the arduous operations that were carried out that night he unintentionally left the stud behind him. It had no doubt fallen from his front as he was working. And another item of valuable evidence was now forthcoming. The waiter who identified the stud remembered on one occasion taking up to Ambrose Shedlock's private sitting-room a bottle of champagne that had been ordered. Shedlock and his three friends were there, and they seemed much interested in some plans or drawings that were spread out on the table. And as the waiter was

leaving the room he heard Shedlock say, "Now, look here, Fallowfield, this thing must be completed by the twelfth, or the whole blooming scheme will be bitched."

Of course, in a case of this kind every little item is calculated to arouse suspicion, and what, under ordinary circumstances, would seem to have no value, becomes of great importance when intricate crime has to be unravelled. Therefore the "plans or drawings" and Fallowfield's remark, overheard by the waiter, were pregnant with significance. And the remark was, perhaps, in some degree of greater confirmatory value than the other things, for, as it happened, the robbery was committed on the twelfth of the month. That very day, in the course of the afternoon, the four men gave up their apartments in the hotel, settled their respective bills, and took their departure. They had a fair amount of luggage, and drove off in two four-wheeled cabs. Through the hotel porter I traced these cabs, as they had been called from a neighbouring rank, and I ascertained that the drivers had conveyed their fares to Victoria Station. There the trail was lost for the time being, as I could not ascertain what had become of the luggage, nor if the four gentlemen had departed at once by train. The small points which I have enumerated as calculated to beget suspicion, were just such as the most cautious and careful of criminals are apt to betray themselves by.

It is very remarkable that while evildoers will often take the greatest amount of trouble to carry out their plans, and will bring a vast amount of intelligence and ingenuity to bear, they almost invariably do some incautious act or other which is calculated to

betray them into the hands of the snarer. Were this not the case, there would be far more undetected crimes than there are. Although I had now made some progress, I was far from having read the riddle; in fact, the scent was lost at Victoria Station, and I was compelled to search for it elsewhere. But what I had gathered so far was suggestive of my theory—of the thieves having made their plans to escape to the Continent—being correct. It was no less clear, however, that they could not have taken their departure on Saturday night, but must have gone on Sunday; and yet I could get no indication at the station that this was so. The Continental trains out of Victoria on that Sunday were unusually crowded; and neither amongst porters nor officials could any one be found who could state that he remembered four individuals answering to the description of the men I wanted. There was the likelihood, of course, that after the work was over they did not all depart at once, or, at any rate, did not all go from the same station. They were clever enough, no doubt, to have been alive to the danger they would run by congregating together, although it was possible they did depart together. But whether that was so or it was not so was not ascertainable, and so far they had baffled pursuit.

Of course Monday's evening papers and Tuesday's morning papers were full of details of the robbery, so far as they could be gathered. Both Prague, Hamblin, and Co.'s premises and Scotland Yard were beset with reporters burning with eagerness to glean every scrap of information. The magnitude of the robbery, no less than the peculiar circumstances attaching to the property stolen, seemed to invest the matter with

the most exciting sensation, as far as the public were concerned, and recognizing this, the papers big and little pandered to it. It is an astonishing, no less than an amusing fact, that while the press generally affects to have a lofty scorn of anything partaking of the nature of sensation in fiction or the drama, the majority of journals live and batten on sensation; and no details of crime are too gruesome to be served up, or no evidence of certain cases too nauseating to be given with unblushing impudence, so long as the public will buy the papers. It is all a matter of filthy lucre. Gruesome and nasty things are eagerly read. That means increased circulation, and increased circulation brings more advertisements.

This wide publicity of the particulars of the robbery would, as a matter of course, be read by the persons I was anxious to come in contact with, and it would show them that the hue and cry was hot and loud. They would therefore become more cautious, and I was pretty sure the stolen articles would not be offered for sale at once anywhere, for the risk would be tremendous. And as I have stated, not a moment had been lost in notifying the Continental police of the robbery. A description of the four men, as far as could be gathered from the hotel people, was also sent out broadcast, and was posted at the door of every police-station in the United Kingdom. But notwithstanding all this, a whole year passed and no trace of the thieves had been found, nor tidings got of the stolen property.

This was very annoying, but I did not despair of ultimately being able to clear the mystery up, though I was doubtful if the property would be recovered. The loss to the firm of jewellers was an almost ruinous one, as they were held to be liable in law for the

goods, and though they offered to make another tiara, it was not the same thing, because the Brazilian stones used in the first one were of exceptional quality. In the hope that they might get information that would be of use, Prague, Hamblin, and Co. offered a reward of five thousand pounds for any particulars that would lead to the recovery of the stolen property, but it proved ineffectual. The bait was not taken. No one came forward to claim the five thousand pounds. One day, however, a curious thing happened, which at once revived my hopes that I should ultimately succeed in running the thieves to earth, and solving the mystery of the robbery. One day a well-dressed lady presented herself at the left-luggage office to claim a bag that had been lying there for twelve months or so. The receipt which she presented bore the date of the 13th of September, that is, the day after the robbery was committed. The thirteenth was a Sunday. As the bag could not be immediately found, having been removed to the lost or unclaimed luggage depôt, she was politely asked to call again, and informed that in the mean time the bag should be looked out.

Consequently a search was at once made, and the bag found. It was then noted that it was very large and very heavy. This fact, coupled with the date on which it had been deposited, aroused a suspicion in the manager's mind, and he thought it worth while to send post-haste for me. Of course it was impossible to say then whether the suspicion was justified or not. Nevertheless, I considered it worth while to be at the office when the lady came to claim the bag, and acting on my advice she was questioned as to how the property had been allowed to remain

unclaimed so long. She stated in answer to this that she had been abroad and had forgotten all about it.

"Did you deposit the bag yourself?" the official next asked.

The question seemed to annoy her, and she answered sharply—

"I don't know that you have any right to question me. The property is mine; and whether I left it myself or somebody else did, matters little."

"Pardon me, madame," said the urbane official, "but the fact is, the property having been here so long, it had been catalogued for our periodical auction sale, and it is no more than my duty to be sure as far as I can that it is delivered to the rightful owner."

"I am the rightful owner," she exclaimed indignantly.

"Just so; but still you will pardon me if I press my question. Did you deposit the bag yourself?"

"No, I did not," she answered, with great warmth.

"Nevertheless it's your property?"

"I have already told you it is."

"Will you oblige me with your card?"

"I haven't got a card here," she snapped, with increasing anger.

"Then please give me your name and address. I am sorry you should feel annoyed, but I am only doing my duty; and should by any possible chance somebody else come forward to claim the bag, it might lead to complications."

"Oh, don't fear," she answered loftily. "No one else *will* come forward."

"Nevertheless it will be more satisfactory if you furnish me with your name and address. As the



legitimate owner of the property, you surely have no objection to do that."

She seemed to reflect for some moments, then answered with ill-concealed annoyance—

"Oh dear, no! I have no objection."

In her hand she had a small silver-mounted reticule. She opened this, and took therefrom a letter. She withdrew the letter from the addressed envelope and handed the envelope to the official, with the remark—

"There, that is my address."

The man took the envelope. It was stamped with a Swiss stamp, bore the Geneva postmark, and was addressed—

"Mrs. Blanche Stanley,  
10, Prospect Villas,  
Hampstead Heath,  
London."

At a sign from me, for I was present during this interview, the official expressed himself as satisfied, and the lady was allowed to have possession of the bag. From what had transpired, her manner, and the foreign envelope, I came to the conclusion that it might be worth while to know a little more about Mrs. Blanche Stanley, and I determined to follow her. By the lady's desire a cab was engaged, and when the heavy bag had been deposited on the roof by the joint exertions of the porter and the cabman, Mrs. Stanley got in, and an address having been given the cab drove off. Before it had got many yards, however, I was following it in a hansom. Instead of proceeding by Hampstead the lady's cab pursued its course over Westminster Bridge, past the Elephant and Castle, and down the Old Kent Road, until it

turned into a side street and drew up at a rather squalid-looking house. Mrs. Stanley jumped out, rang the bell at the door, which was opened by a man, who received the bag from the driver and carried it in. The driver was then paid, the cab dismissed, the lady went into the house, and the door was closed.

All these small details I carefully weighed in my own mind, and came to the conclusion that they warranted me in making further investigations. Of course it might all be right and proper, but I knew what value to attach to such matters, and made my plans accordingly. In the course of a few days I was in possession of the following facts. The house near the Old Kent Road, where the bag had been taken to, was in the occupation of a man who was known as Jacob Johnson. He had lived in the house for about two years, and was supposed to be in some employment in the city, but he spent much of his time at home. Mrs. Blanche Stanley was a lodger at 10, Prospect Place, Hampstead Heath. She had only lived there for about three months, and nothing was known about her, but according to her own account she was temporarily sojourning in England on business, her husband being abroad. As soon as her business was settled, however, she intended to go abroad again. From all accounts she was a very reserved woman, did not associate with any one in the house, and never talked about her affairs. She dressed well, seemed well supplied with money, and went out a good deal. She also received letters from abroad very frequently, and I soon learnt that most of her letters bore the Geneva post-mark.

All these little details, coupled with the incident of the bag, seemed to me very significant, and I was

forced to the conclusion that there was some mystery in connection with Mrs. Blanche Stanley, as she called herself, that was worth solving. It was certainly a suspicious circumstance that she should have gone to the station to claim a bag that had been lying there over twelve months. It was also suspicious that the bag should have been placed in the left-luggage office on Sunday the thirteenth, that is, the day of the robbery; suspicious also was the fact that she should take the bag to another house, instead of to the one she was living in. Then again, there was some mystery about Jacob Johnson, the man who received the bag from her. So far as I could ascertain he was not in any employment, and yet he paid his way. He lived with his wife, and kept one servant, a middle-aged woman. The butcher who sent meat to the house believed that Johnson "did a bit in bookmaking;" but this was only a surmise. The butcher considered him a highly respectable man, for he paid his account regularly. That was an unmistakable sign of respectability, from the butcher's point of view. Johnson generally spent his evenings at a neighbouring tavern, where he passed the time in playing dominoes. He was a great smoker, and consumed much beer. Occasionally, about once a week on an average, he and his "missus" went to a theatre. They patronized the gallery, and generally took a basket of provisions with them, and a big bottle of beer. As often as not their servant accompanied them. Johnson was a big burly fellow, suggestive somewhat of the typical blacksmith, so far as his brawny limbs and large hands were concerned. But his features were coarse. He was pitted deeply with small-pox, and had a low forehead, with eyes

that bespoke craft and cunning rather than intelligence.

As compared with this man, Mrs. Stanley was a very superior sort of woman. There was an air of refinement about her. She had the appearance of being well-bred. She wrote an exceedingly good hand—that I discovered—and she read a great deal.

From what I had now seen I felt it advisable to place Mr. Jacob Johnson under observation, and I myself kept a sharp eye on Mrs. Stanley. What was her connection with Johnson? was the question I was anxious to have answered. After she had paid him that visit when she delivered the bag into his possession, she went there no more. That fact seemed to indicate there was no intimacy between them.

If he was the owner of the bag, why did he not go to the station and claim it himself? If he was not the owner of the bag, why did she take it to him? These points were instructive, and I began to feel they were links in the chain I was gradually putting together. Of course the pivot upon which the whole matter turned was the very significant fact of the bag having been deposited on the thirteenth, remaining unclaimed for a year, and then being conveyed by the person who claimed it to another individual, who, so far as one could judge, might have claimed it himself. To have known the contents of the bag I would have given a good deal; but my curiosity had to remain for the time unsatisfied.

About five weeks after the bag had been removed from Victoria Station, Mrs. Stanley intimated to her landlady that she intended to give up possession of her apartments; and a week later her luggage was piled on to a four-wheeler, and she was driven to

Charing Cross Station. There she secured a first-class through ticket for Geneva, *via* Macon; and when the Continental express steamed away a little later, she was a passenger in it. So was I. When we gained French soil I soon ascertained that the lady was used to foreign travel. She spoke French fluently, and evidently knew her way about.

During our journey towards the Swiss frontier, I began to think—in fact, felt sure—I was on the eve of a revelation. What that revelation was likely to be I could only guess at; but my reasoning inclined me strongly to the belief that it would be in connection with the stolen tiara, and I naturally experienced a sense of satisfaction, and indeed I confess to growing a little excited as we neared our destination, for it would be a triumph indeed if I should be successful in laying by the heels the rascals who had so cleverly performed the feat of carrying off the Empress of Brazil's wonderful tiara.

In due course we reached Geneva. The lady was met by a gentlemanly looking man. He was young, well-dressed, good-looking, and unmistakably not an Englishman. The cut of his clothes, the trim of his moustache, his features altogether suggested the Frenchman. He and Mrs. Stanley conversed in French, and when they had cleared their luggage at the douane, they drove to the hotel Beau Rivage, where they were known as Monsieur and Madame Pinét. They had lived in the hotel for about four months previous to madame's visit to England.

In London the lady had been Mrs. Blanche Stanley. In Geneva she was Madame Pinét. Why did she consider it necessary to change her name in each place? Clearly for no honest purpose. Monsieur, as

I have said, was an exceedingly good-looking fellow. In age he was not more than thirty, while madame was somewhat younger. He did not answer in any way to the description of the men wanted for the diamond robbery, and so far as I had gathered no woman had been prominently mixed up in the affair. Who were these young people, then? There was some mystery about them, but had it not been for the bag there would have been no reason to suppose they had had any connection with the robbery. There was abundant evidence that they had ample means. They lived well, spent freely, and kept an account at the *Crédit Lyonnais*. Altogether they seemed to be people of importance; at any rate, they were so considered in the hotel.

A fortnight passed, then they stored their luggage at a warehouse in Geneva, and with only a handbag or two and a trunk they left the city, and booked to Paris, where they spent three days, putting up at the *Grand Hotel*. During those three days they paid many visits. On the morning of the fourth day they departed for London, and took up their quarters at the *Charing Cross Hotel*, where on the following day they received a visit from Mr. Jacob Johnson from the Old Kent Road. He had got himself up for the occasion, being dressed in his Sunday best, while his massive hands were covered with a pair of cheap, ill-fitting kid gloves.

The play was getting more and more interesting, and I shadowed my people with increased eagerness. I was convinced there would be developments shortly, and with an untiring vigilance I watched and waited.

One morning, a week later, monsieur and madame, who had registered at the hotel as "Mr. and Mrs.

Bradley," drove to Waterloo Station, where they were joined by Mr. Jacob Johnson, still in his Sunday best, and the three booked first-class to Plymouth. The mystery was deepening, but it had not yet reached its climax. They spent the night at Plymouth, and the following day put the scant luggage they had with them into a carriage, and were driven to Dartmoor. It was a beautiful day, and but for the fact of their taking their luggage with them, it would have seemed a perfectly natural thing, as strangers in the town, for them to visit the far-famed moor, which possesses such unique attractions, that few people who go to the neighbourhood for the first time care to pass them by. Indeed it may be said that Dartmoor is without a rival in its own particular line, while the wildness of the scenery, the bracing properties of the air, its monuments of an age that is lost in the mists of antiquity, the glorious panoramic views that are unfolded before the wondering eye, all combine to make this wild and romantic strip of England well worthy of a pilgrimage from the ends of the earth. But it occurred to me that "Mr. and Mrs. Bradley," and their companion Mr. Jacob Johnson, were not going to the moor merely as lovers of wild nature, but with some deep, underlying motive, which, if I could but discover, might provide me with a key to unravel the mystery I was so anxious to solve.

They drove for some hours, and passing through Princetown, proceeded to a sequestered little nook, some two miles further on, known as Two Bridges, where they put up at the Saracen's Head, a charming old-time little hostelry. Here the luggage was taken out of the carriage, the carriage was dismissed, and the interesting visitors informed the landlord that

they intended to remain for a few days. They made no inquiries about terms, but simply said they wanted the best the house afforded.

The Saracen's Head is most delightfully situated. It lies in a hollow far from the madding crowd, and no more health-giving spot can be found in the whole of Great Britain than Two Bridges. The Saracen's Head is a lonely hostelry, and must have been built originally hundreds of years ago. Probably at one time it was a religious house, but now in its modern garb it is replete with comfort and cosiness, which make it peculiarly suitable as a place of rest and repose for any one who wants to get close to the great heart of nature, and to gaze on the heavens undimmed by dun palls of smoke. Here in this delightful retreat no factory chimneys offend the artistic eye. The wanton airs, pure as when they issue from the caves of the winds, blow over vast stretches of moorland, and brace and invigorate the enfeebled frame, making the sickly strong, and the strong stronger.

Again I say that under ordinary circumstances there would have been nothing to arouse suspicion in the fact of three persons taking up their residence for a time in the picturesque hostelry, with its magnificent and romantic surroundings; but I was now convinced that the two men and the woman I had been shadowing so long had gone there with some sinister motive. And this may be better understood when I explain, for the benefit of those who may not be acquainted with the district, that at Princetown, two miles away, is the great convict establishment, known as Dartmoor Prison. Princetown has a considerable population, and it boasts of a railway station.



It is the terminus of a local branch line, specially constructed to serve the prison, and over this line many a chained wretch has travelled on his way to the prison house where he was to suffer the penalty of his crime. But for aught one can see or hear of this great prison at Two Bridges it might be a hundred miles away. When once you have passed the prison you descend by a curving road, until suddenly you come upon a tiny bridge, spanning what is little more than a rill in the summer time, and then rising slightly you find yourself in front of the lonely hostelry; but lonely though it be, something in its external appearance suggests a warm welcome and comfort. For the antiquarian and artist alike it has a charm, and it fills the ordinary traveller with anticipations of creature comforts. But though "Mr. and Mrs. Bradley," the morning after their arrival, set off over the moorland with sketch-book in hand, I was convinced that it was not as art-students they had gone to that secluded spot.

Winter still lingered on the moor. Snow lay in great drifts here and there, and the wind swept along the valley with a keenness that made wraps a necessity. But the sky was cloudless, and the sun shone brilliantly. Mr. Johnson sat on a seat in front of the hotel, basking in the sun, and smoking his pipe.

For a day or two I took up my abode in Princetown. Then I deemed it advisable to shift my quarters to the Saracen's Head, and in order that my presence might not beget any suspicion, I let it be supposed that I was an antiquarian interested in the many objects of interest to be found on the moor. I did not associate with the other three visitors; in fact, it was clear they wished to avoid me, and I took my

meals in a private room. I soon found that Jacob Johnson went every night to Princetown, and his movements grew more and more suspicious, until I began to make a pretty accurate guess why he and his companions had come to Two Bridges. And I no longer had a doubt that I was in the way of clearing up the mystery which had so long surrounded the robbery at Prague, Hamblin, and Co.'s premises.

I was particularly careful, of course, not to arouse the suspicions of the trio, and I went about as if I was utterly blind to their presence. They always had their meals together, and gave a good deal of trouble; at least "Mr. and Mrs. Bradley" did. They were what is known as "finnickin' and faddy." They dined late, and insisted on having soup, fish, entrees, flesh, fowl, and all the etceteras of a first-class dinner. They were no less choice about their wine, of which they drank a considerable quantity. However, mine host of the Saracen's Head knew how to cater for his well-paying guests, who expressed their entire satisfaction.

It was obvious that the young man and woman were refined, and used to good living. They belonged to a different class of society to that to which Mr. Johnson belonged. He was not only a glutton, but an uncultivated bore. He fed himself with his knife, took up bones from his plate with his fingers, and gnawed them as a dog would do. He drank champagne by the tumblerful at a draught, and, as I ascertained, disgusted his companions, although they endeavoured to conceal their feelings.

These little details were like handwriting on the wall. It showed that the bond between Johnson and the other two was not a bond of friendship. They

were linked together by some secret knowledge, otherwise Johnson's presence would not have been tolerated by the other two.

Although, when they first arrived, they told the landlord that they intended to stay for three or four days only, their sojourn stretched far beyond that limit. A fortnight passed, and they showed no intention of departing. Indeed they expressed themselves so satisfied with the fare, the landlord, and the charming little house, that they intimated the probability of remaining on for some time longer. Under these circumstances I deemed it prudent to shift my quarters for fear of arousing their suspicions if I stayed at the Saracen's Head. But though I went away I did not go far. I secured a lodging in a private house in Princetown, not very far from the gloomy and well-guarded pile where so many desperate malefactors were working out their dread punishment for crime committed against society. It may be gathered, however, that I in no way relaxed my vigilance. I was watching for something that would justify my suspicions, and give me a tangible hold upon these mysterious people. That they had not come to that remote region for any legitimate purpose I was prepared to stake my existence, and so long as I was impressed with that belief I was not the man to give up my quest.

One evening I was made aware of the fact that Johnson had hired a horse and gig from the landlord of the Saracen's Head. He stated that he wanted to drive to Tavistock. The hour was about seven in the evening when he started upon his journey, and as I was much interested in knowing why he wished to take the journey at that time, I adopted means for

being not far behind him. He journeyed leisurely over the vast moorland, until in due course he reached the delightful little town of Tavistock, where he put up at the Bedford Hotel, and at once ordered dinner for two in a private room. The second person he said would arrive shortly. Half an hour later *she* did arrive. The second person was a rather good-looking, buxom woman of about thirty. She was dressed neatly and plainly. When she removed her gloves her hands betrayed that she belonged to the working-class. She wore a wedding-ring, and by her speech she clearly lacked education, but her face was bright and intelligent. They dined together, spent two hours at the hotel, then left in the gig, which was driven towards Princetown. But half way there the woman alighted, and the man continued the journey alone. I allowed him to go on, and I shadowed the woman. She footed it to Princetown. It was a dark night, and but few people were met on the road. When she reached her destination she entered a cottage standing in a little garden.

Before I went to my bed that night I had ascertained that the cottage was her home, that she was the mother of two children, and the wife of a warder in the prison. His name was Joseph Martin; he had been there about two years, having formerly been employed in the same capacity at Portland. He was a big, fine, powerful man, with a determined expression of face.

Two days later, at night, Johnson, and Mr. and Mrs. Bradley left the Saracen's Head for a stroll after dinner. They walked along the road that led away from Princetown for about a mile and a half, until they came to a very lonely spot near a tor, where

they were joined by a fourth person. The fourth person was Joseph Martin the warder. For some time they continued in conversation, then they separated. Martin went on to the moorland, and disappeared in the darkness. The other three returned by the road and regained their hotel. A week later they repaired to the same rendezvous, and were again joined by a fourth person; but this time it was Martin's wife. These people no doubt believed that they were acting very cleverly, and that their secrets were carefully guarded, but they had betrayed themselves into my hands. I was convinced then that the beginning of the end was not far off, and that before I was much older I should have cleared up the mystery.

Two days later Johnson and his companions settled their score, engaged a conveyance to take them back to Plymouth, and that night left by the mail train for London. Thus ended another act in the strange drama.

When the curtain rose again it was on an entire change of scene. Not far from London Fields stood a somewhat dilapidated house. It was a house that belonged to the past, and represented a time when the neighbourhood was rural, when trees grew uncontaminated by the smoke of the great city, and when the song of the nightingale might have been heard in its season. At this time, however, the house was untenanted. It looked forlorn, miserable, and falling to decay, and it was obvious that sooner or later it must be cleared away to make room for something more modern. Round about were many "eligible plots of freehold land for sale, for building purposes," and the speculative builder was already on the war-path. The house had erstwhile been known as "Acacia

Cottage;" the name was still faintly discernible on the gate post. It stood in melancholy solitude in about half an acre of ground that had become a wilderness of weeds. A few withered and death-stricken fruit trees were dotted about. A moss-grown, tottering wall surrounded the wilderness, where lay a defunct cat or two, with stony eyes staring blindly, and there was besides a miscellaneous collection of old boots, broken bottles, and other rubbish. Into that place of mouldering things two persons went one night. The two persons were Mr. Bradley and Johnson. They prowled about for a little while to assure themselves that the coast was clear. Then they entered in at the gateway, proceeded stealthily to the back of the house, where Johnson produced a spade from a bag he carried. It was a spade with a short handle, similar to the ones used by sappers and miners. Selecting a particular spot he began to dig, while Bradley held a bull's eye lantern in such a way as to illumine the place where Johnson was at work. The digger worked vigorously for a time, until at length he unearthed a small wooden box about a foot long, six inches broad, and a foot in depth. The box was got out of the hole. It bore the brand of a well-known firm of starch-makers. But there was no starch in it then. The hole was filled up with the earth again, which was then trampled down, and the work being over the light was extinguished. The spade, which was now a useless encumbrance, was tossed away, and the two men departed, taking the box with them.

I had witnessed this interesting proceeding, and keeping in their track as if I had been their own shadow, I accompanied them to Johnson's house near the Old Kent Road. Ten minutes or so after they

had entered there was a rat-tat on the door; the rat-tat purposely simulating a postman's knock, for it is astonishing how eagerly people open the door to the postman. As I anticipated—for it was I who knocked—I was not kept long waiting. The door was opened by a woman, and I entered into the house without any ceremony and in the Queen's name, for I held a magistrate's warrant, and I was immediately followed by two policemen in plain clothes. The woman uttered a warning cry of alarm, and we heard much commotion in the little front parlour. But in a few moments we had entered into the parlour also, where we found Johnson and Bradley, and on the table was the damp and mud-stained starch-box, which they were engaged upon opening, but which they had not yet opened, as the lid was securely nailed, while some stout copper wire had been wound round the box several times, the better to secure it. On the faces of both men was an expression of concentrated amazement mingled with alarm. Bradley had suddenly gone deadly pale, so had Johnson, but he speedily recovered himself, and with a savage glare in his eyes he said—

“What the devil do you want here?”

“I have some business with you,” I answered.

“It's a curious way to come and do business,” he growled, with a glance at the poker that lay in the fender at the fireplace as though he contemplated an assault. But he thought better of it. “What is your business?” he demanded gruffly.

“Well, for one thing, I want to know what you have got in that box,” I answered.

“Then it strikes me you won't know,” he exclaimed, as he attempted to snatch the box up; but one of my

colleagues laid his hand upon it and prevented him. Then glaring like some wild animal at bay, he said defiantly, "Look here, governor, this house is mine, and an Englishman's house is his castle, so unless you want blood shed, clear out. You've no right here."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Johnson," I answered. "I have every right, as this proves," and I showed him the warrant.

His countenance fell again, and he mumbled out, "This is some idiotic mistake, you know. I'm an honest working-man, I am."

"I am glad to hear it," I answered; "and when that is clearly proved I shall have to suffer for my mistake, and the law will make you reparation. In the mean time, I shall take possession of that box, and you and your companion will accompany me to the station."

"Not if I know it," growled Johnson, looking very much like a savage animal again, and evidently by his whole manner contemplating a struggle for liberty.

But one of my companions, an exceptionally powerful man, fell upon him, and before he could offer anything but a passive resistance he had handcuffed him.

Up to this point Bradley had not spoken. Our sudden appearance upon the scene seemed to have dumfounded him, and he looked like a man who was dazed. But at last he said, speaking in good English, but with a foreign accent—

"I must protest against this outrage, for outrage it certainly is; and I refuse to go with you."

"Your refusal is useless," I answered.

"Upon what grounds do you arrest me?" he asked.

"I arrest you on suspicion of being concerned in



the robbery from Prague, Hamblin, and Co.'s premises more than a year ago," I said.

"Robbery of what?"

"Of diamonds and precious stones."

"I was not in England then," he replied, "and I can prove it."

"So much the better for you," I answered; "but my duty is plain. You are my prisoner, and must go with me. Resistance is useless, and will only lead to a scene."

"I yield to force," he answered; "but I do so under protest. I have a request to make. My wife is with me in London. Pray let me see her, and explain that this is all a mistake."

"The lady you call your wife is being looked after," I said; "and no doubt by this time she also is in custody."

His whole manner changed at this announcement, and with a fierce expression of exasperation he cried—

"This is damnable and infamous; I will not survive the disgrace." So saying he plunged his hands into his coat pocket, and drew out a revolver, the muzzle of which he placed to his temple; but with a quick, sharp movement I struck him on the forearm and caused him to drop the weapon. Before he could recover it I had handcuffed him, and picking up the revolver I took possession of it. He looked terribly crestfallen; a pitiable expression of despair came into his eyes, and unable to control himself he burst into tears.

Procuring two four-wheeled cabs we conveyed our prisoners to Bow Street, where I found Mrs. Bradley had already arrived. The effect of the arrest on her had almost deprived her of her senses, and I really felt sorry for her, for I could not help thinking she

had been but a weak instrument in the hands of the man.

The importance of the arrest could not be overrated, though I was convinced we had not yet got hold of the ringleaders. These people were subordinates, but I was convinced some important results would come out of that night's work, nor was I mistaken. As soon as the charges had been entered and the prisoners were safe under lock and key, the mysterious box was conveyed to Scotland Yard, where in the presence of officials it was opened, and found to contain nearly the whole of the precious stones which had been taken from the tray in the strong-room of Prague, Hamblin, and Co.'s place on the night the tiara was stolen. In addition there were some of the diamonds, and also a number of very valuable rings, which were no doubt the proceeds of another robbery, as Hamblin and Co. did not identify them.

Having swept these three individuals into my net, the next step was to try and lay hold of their confederates, for there was now every reason to suppose there was a gang, and a good deal had to be done before the mystery could be cleared up. With a view to that end I left London the next evening for Brussels. That step was determined by certain correspondence found in Bradley's luggage, which was seized at his hotel, and which afforded me such important information that I lost no time in acting upon.

As soon as I arrived in the Belgium capital I placed myself in communication with the chief of the police, who promised to render me every possible assistance, and, accompanied by some of his best men, I proceeded a little later to a swell house situated in the Rue Cambon. It was a very grand house

indeed, with a marble-tiled entrance hall, a magnificent *escalier*, with massive carved balustrade. There were rich paintings, sculpture, exotic plants, carved oak furniture, all of which gave the entrance to the lordly mansion an imposing appearance, calculated to impress humble mortals with the power of greatness and riches. And as befitted so palatial a residence, the portals were guarded by a superb lackey, resplendent in crimson and gold, who bore himself with the air and pomposity of a grandee of the mediæval ages. This richly appointed dwelling-house was in the occupancy of one who styled himself the Baron von Hentschel—by birth a German, by naturalization a Belgian. The baron kept quite a retinue of servants, and the baron's lady lived as though she thought that all else beside herself was of mortal mould. But for reasons which society thought proper to keep to itself, society did not admit the Baron von Hentschel and the baroness into its sacred circles. But as if to avenge himself on society for this slight, Herr Baron was in the habit of giving the most magnificent dinners and balls, which were said to put even the King's receptions into the shade. The baron's guests, however, were of very common clay. They were mostly of the trading class. But Jews and Jewesses figured largely at these functions, for the baron was himself an Israelite.

From the foregoing particulars the reader will infer that the baron was a fraud, and the inference will be correct. Certain documents and letters found in Mr. "Bradley's" luggage placed me upon the baron's trail, and furnished me with particulars, which I proceeded to make use of, while the co-operation of the Brussels police was of the greatest

use. Presenting myself at the mansion in the Rue Cambon, the golden and crimson lackey received me with a lofty disdain, and gave me to understand that unless I had very special business with the great one he would not see me, as he was very much engaged. I told the menial that my business was of a very special nature and would brook no delay; but, as this statement did not prove sufficiently strong as an *open sesame*, I hailed my colleagues, who had remained outside. And then, to the utter consternation of the portal guardian, who seemed as if he was going to drop down in a fit, we swept him aside, and mounted up the broad and soundless stairs, our plebeian feet sinking deeply into the velvet-pile carpets. Gaining the upper landing, which was even more magnificently appointed than the lower hall, we filed along it, and entered a stately chamber, with painted and panelled ceiling, and furnished with the sumptuousness of the Louis Quinze period. Here we were met by a stately butler, an Englishman, with mutton-chop whiskers and spotless linen. He fell back in amazement at our uncereemonious intrusion, and demanded to know our business.

"We wish to see the baron," I said.

"That is impossible, gentlemen," he answered, with the suavity of his race. "The baron is much occupied."

"Nothing is impossible to resolute men," I replied; and we passed on.

The butler was too much flabbergasted to do more than make a feeble protest. At the end of the chamber hung massive, embossed velvet curtains, screening a doorway. Raising the curtains we found ourselves in another lofty and richly furnished room, where a lady's-maid confronted us, and, like the butler and

the lackey, appeared stricken with an all but paralyzing astonishment; for we were seven men, and obviously uninvited guests. Moreover, though my companions were in plain clothes, it needed no very practised eye to determine that they represented the majesty of the law. What it was that proclaimed this it is difficult to put into so many words. Suffice it that it was so, and the woman's expression of face indicated that she smelt a rat, to use a vulgar phrase.

"Kindly direct us to Monsieur le Baron's room," I said.

She pointed dumbly to a side door, gorgeous with decorated panels. Pressing down the lever handle we flung the door wide and entered. At that moment the baron, attired in a costly robe, was reclining on an ottoman, smoking a cigarette, while on a Turkish stool beside him was coffee, and a boy in buttons stood ready to do his slightest bidding. The baron was reading, but our unannounced entrance so startled him that the book fell from his hand, and he sprang up into a sitting posture.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded in French.

He was a "tall, gentlemanly-looking man," and though the appearance of his face was changed by a moustache and beard, I felt sure, comparing him with a photograph I had, that he was the "Ambrose Shedlock" who had stayed at the London Hotel previous to the robbery at Prague, Hamblin, and Co.'s premises.

"It means," answered one of my colleagues, "that we arrest you on suspicion of your being a thief, a forger, a receiver of stolen goods, an adventurer."

"Pooh, pooh!" he exclaimed, with remarkable coolness, as he put his half-burnt cigarette into the

ash-tray, and proceeded to light another. "This is a stupid and idiotic mistake." Then, addressing his page-boy, he said, "Henri, give me a *petit verre*." The boy went to a buffet, poured out a glass of cognac, and handed it to his master, who swallowed the liquor at a gulp, and as he put the glass down he laughed bitterly, and added, "Really, gentlemen, this farce is so absurd that I cannot help laughing. But it is proverbial of you people that you are always making blunders. You have made a monumental one this time, as you will find to your cost, for not even the police of this police-and-spy-ridden city have a right to intrude themselves into a nobleman's dwelling in such a brusque fashion."

"Well, we are not here to argue the point with you," replied my colleague, sternly. "It is for you to disprove the charges we shall bring against you, and if you successfully do that we must take the consequences of our blunder. In the mean time you will accompany us."

"Where to?" asked the baron, showing signs now of being much disturbed.

"To the station."

"Oh, nonsense;" and the baron's manner changed. An anger light gleamed from his eyes, and he glanced nervously at an inlaid chest of drawers that stood in one corner of the apartment.

"There is no nonsense about it," said the police official, as, going forward a pace or two, he laid a heavy hand on the baron's shoulder. "You are a prisoner," he added.

For a moment the baron seemed as if he meant to resent this; but only for a moment. He recognized the tremendous odds against him, and saw that three

of the other men had drawn revolvers from their pockets. Instantly he was all suavity again, and, smiling pleasantly, said—

“Of course I shall go with you; but permit me first to have a word in private with Madame la Baronne.”

“No, that cannot be permitted.”

“But surely——” he protested.

“I have spoken,” answered the official. “You may see madame in our presence; not otherwise.”

The baron bowed; then, to Henri, said, “Tell madame to come here, and say that by a stupid mistake I have been arrested.”

The boy took his departure, but not alone. At a sign from the chief, one of the men accompanied him, and when the baron saw this his countenance fell again.

In about ten minutes madame sailed into the room. She was a fine-looking woman, but painted and bedizened. She had rings on nearly all her fingers, and costly jewels were in her hair and round her neck. There was no trace of the Israelite about her, and very little indeed about the baron. The woman was in great distress. She asked in French what it all meant. Her French betrayed an unmistakable British accent, and I answered her in English.

“Your husband is under arrest. He is suspected of having taken part in the great robbery of diamonds more than a year ago from Prague, Hamblin, and Co.’s premises in London.”

“Oh, humbug, nonsense, ridiculous!” she exclaimed.

“That is what I say, my dear,” put in the baron, speaking in excellent English also. “Of course we shall disprove this absurd charge; but it is very

distressing. However, keep your courage up, my love, and be careful."

They exchanged significant glances, which did not escape my observation, and I had no doubt there was an understanding between them. But if madame thought she was to be left in undisturbed possession of the place she must have been woefully disappointed when it was announced that she would have to remain in the room while the house was thoroughly searched. The Continental police do not do things by halves in a case of this kind, and it appeared that when I applied to the chef de police he had already had the supposed baron under surveillance as a suspect. But up to my appearance on the scene they had not been able to formulate any definite charge against him. What had brought him under suspicion was the fact that men of notoriously bad character had been known to visit him. Armed as I was with certain particulars which left little doubt that the baron was an adventurer of a very dangerous type, the chef gathered at once that he would be justified in taking every possible means to get indisputable evidence of the baron's roguery. And of course it was not likely he would overlook the strong probability that such evidence would be got in the house itself. Consequently we were fully authorized to take the steps we did. But I don't think any of us was prepared for the astounding state of matters the search was to reveal. Though for myself I may say that when I arrived in Brussels, I was convinced that if I laid hands on the baron, *alias* Ambrose Shedlock, and a host of other aliases, the capture would prove of the highest importance. To proceed, however, with the narrative. The baron protested his innocence with



the energy of a desperate cause, and he pleaded, entreated, prayed to be allowed to write a few letters and put his affairs in order before being removed. But he might just as well have appealed to the heavens to rain down fire upon us. The law, as represented by those stern men, was stone deaf and adamant. And though he cried out in fierce indignation against what he termed the "brutal insult," he was handcuffed, after the page-boy, in obedience to orders, had brought him his boots, coat, and hat. And finally, when he saw that there could be no further delay, he passed through the gilded rooms, down the heavily carpeted stairs, into the hall, where the amazed servants had gathered in a group, but none looked more stupefied with surprise and horror than the gold and crimson lackey, whose pride was wounded to the quick, and whose dignity was crushed as it had never been crushed before. Two men carefully guarded the baron, whose heart must have turned to lead as he went forth from his marble halls with the gyves of ignominy upon his wrists, and realizing, as he must have realized, that the game was up. He had staked heavily and lost.

The five of us who remained behind at once proceeded to carry out our task. The servants were all ordered to assemble in the hall, and stir not, at the peril of their liberty. The great door was locked and the key taken away, so that they could have no communication with the outer world. Madame was confined to her boudoir. Then we began with the baron's smoking-room, and in the little chest of drawers I have referred to were several loaded revolvers, and the search proceeded. An immense mass of correspondence and documents was seized for

future examination. There were letters written in numerous languages, including Russian, Greek, Hebrew, and even Chinese. As our labours continued, it soon became evident that we had brought to light a gigantic system of crime, which had been so well-organized that it had almost been reduced to a science. In a room, which we gathered from the servants was sacred to the lord and lady of the house, we discovered thousands and thousands of pounds worth of valuable property, consisting for the most part of precious stones and jewellery of all kinds. And from a secret drawer in a bureau we brought to light a quantity of the Brazillian brilliants which had composed the tiara. There was now no longer a doubt that the arch-plotter in that cleverly arranged robbery was safe in the grip of the law; but evidence was forthcoming that, while he was the head, the band he controlled was a numerous one, and some of them we had already captured in London. But others remained to be secured.

The work of mastering all the details of the stupendous business in wrong-doing carried on by this prince of rogues was a long and arduous one; but, bit by bit, this and that was pieced together, and by the aid of letters, documents, books, and memoranda, of which there were sufficient to fill a large waggon, we gradually learnt to what an extraordinary extent, intellect, ability, and cleverness had been exercised in order that a band of men might live in luxury and ease by wrong-doing, rather than exert themselves and use their talents to honest and better purposes. And seldom have the annals of crime furnished us with a more startling illustration of the aphorism that "the evil-doer can never prosper."

Better a thousand times that a man should live in honest poverty than seek to clothe himself in purple and fine linen at the expense of his fellows. Though occasionally some few who do evil may escape the meshes of the law, it is certain that, in the end, the majority must be overtaken and expiate their crimes in shame and disgrace. Not to weary my readers, I may summarize the sequel to this strange story.

Having got hold of the main threads, we were enabled slowly but surely to unravel the tangled skein; and, having got on the trail, I followed it step by step, each step bringing to light new features which seemed more astonishing than those we already knew.

The prime mover in the gigantic conspiracy of wickedness was "Baron von Hentschel," though he was not a baron, nor was his name Hentschel, and of course had no legitimate right whatever to the prefix of "von," which in Germany indicates nobility. His real name was Fritz Schmidt. He belonged to a very good German-Swiss family, and had been born in Zurich, where his father followed the profession of the law. Fritz had received a good education, and studied for some time at Bonn, where he showed remarkable aptitude as a linguist. Returning to his native town he became a teacher in a public school. But he had patrician tastes; he was fond of luxury; he loved ease. The drudgery of a teacher's life did not suit him, and he soon found himself unoccupied. His father, although not wealthy, had means, and he sent him to travel about the world for a time. Perhaps it was the very worst thing that could have been done. The naturally indolent and luxury-loving Fritz, having once partaken of the sweets of idleness, was not likely to return readily to any position of

dependence. His ambition grew with his travels. He determined to soar to great heights; but the road of honesty that might have led thereto was too laborious, too slow for him, and he resolved to live by his wits. In the process of time he dubbed himself a baron, and prefixed "von" before his assumed name of Hentschel, which, however, was only one of many names he passed under from time to time. While in England he formed the acquaintance of a lady who was the daughter of a draper; but, like Fritz, she was discontented with her lot in life. She wanted to be a grand lady, and she completely fell under the mesmeric influence of his narrated dreams of splendour, and consented to link her fate to his for good or evil. In time she bore him a son, who was brought up in France. By the time this son verged on manhood's estate his father and mother were engaged in a stupendous enterprise of enriching themselves at the expense of their fellow-beings.

At this period they were known as the Baron and Baroness von Hentschel, and Fritz adopted the Jewish persuasion for reasons which no doubt seemed to him good from his point of view. They then inhabited a comparatively modest establishment in the city of Antwerp. But, with the expansion of their schemes, they shifted their ground to Brussels, and took up their quarters in the palatial residence where I found them. They tried hard at first to get into "society," but society would have none of them, and so they formed a little world of their own.

The "baron" now became notorious as a speculator, company promoter, and goodness know what; but, though most of the things that he had anything to do with came to grief, he strangely enough went on

flourishing, until the tongue of rumour and scandal began to whisper some unkind things, and yet every one was afraid to formulate anything like a distinct charge against the baron, whose lavish style of living and seeming wealth attracted a large following of sycophants and mammon worshippers. When at last the bubble was pricked, how loud were the exclamations of virtuous horror and righteous indignation by the hypocrites who had been only too glad to feast at his grand banquets.

Whilst I assiduously worked away to piece link to link in the powerful chain I was slowly winding round the arch-adventurer, the Brussels police were scarcely less active; and, having got a clue, they began to bring home to him crime after crime, most of them betraying an originality of conception which made one grieved to think it had been so mis-applied. I saw, of course, that if the Belgian police established their accusations, the enterprising "baron" would in all probability pay the debt of nature before I could produce him in an English court. But I had netted three of his band, and was hopeful of securing more.

As the work went on it was made clear that the "Ambrose Shedlock" of London was the "Baron von Hentschel" of Brussels. But in London he appeared with a clean-shaved face, save a small and graceful moustache. Associated with him in that wondrous piece of villainy, which had for its object the carrying off the tiara of diamonds which should have been worn by the Empress of Brazil, were at least a dozen men. Amongst them were two clever rogues, who passed under the names respectively of John Smithson and Robert Arkwright, and they managed to secure the services of a very ingenious mechanic named Job

Fallowfield, who was a native of Manchester, and was employed for a long time in a big engineering establishment there. Growing dissatisfied, however, he shifted his quarters to London, and started a little place on his own account. His services were secured to manufacture a very remarkable and very effective drill, which was subsequently used for cutting a hole in the safe. Since the commission of the crime the man who had called himself "Arkwright" had died, and Smithson had disappeared, enriched no doubt by the plunder. Another rascal whose services were enlisted, and who was destined to ultimately give them away, as the saying is, was a man whose real name was James Plant, who had already suffered a term of imprisonment for burglary, and was considered one of the most expert burglars in London. He was the man I came to know as Jacob Johnson, and who lived out of the Old Kent Road. He had a son Walter, who was also mixed up in the job. Previous to the robbery this interesting family resided at Acacia Cottage, near London Fields. The son had also suffered imprisonment. It was Walter Plant and his father who did most of the heavy work on that fateful night when Prague, Hamblin, and Co.'s premises were entered. It was Walter who got into the strong room when the hole had been cut in the door, and it was he who appropriated as an extra share of the swag the tray full of precious stones. It appeared that the father got to know of this subsequently, and strongly advised his son not to attempt to dispose of them for some time. Walter acted on this advice, and hid them, but would not say what he had done with them. A few weeks later he was arrested for another affair in the city, and the case

being proved against him up to the hilt, and as he had been previously convicted, he was sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude.

The young man known as "Bradley" was the Baron von Hentschel's son. He had previously lived in England for some time, and had made the acquaintance of a Miss Lumsden, known to me afterwards as Mrs. Blanche Stanley. She belonged to good people, but was overcome by young Schmidt, alias Pinét, alias many other names. It appeared that he did not go to the Prague, Hamblin's place on the night of the robbery as he was suffering from a bad sore throat; but he was in London. He helped in the preparations for the job, and it was he who drew up a plan of the premises, and made a design for the drill, so of course he shared in the plunder.

And now comes not the least extraordinary part of this extraordinary story of evil. When the chief actors in the drama had finished their exploit they betook themselves abroad, but strangely enough left behind them at the Victoria railway-station the bag which was destined to prove their undoing. That bag contained the drill, two or three jemmies, a crow-bar, some steel wedges, a dark lantern or two, and the plan of the premises. It was through young Fritz Schmidt's carelessness that it was left behind, as he had been specially charged to take care of it, the intention being that it should be dropped overboard into the English Channel, as the fugitives crossed in the steamer. When something like a year had passed, Mrs. Schmidt, alias "Blanche Stanley," returned to London to see a sister who was in a dying state, and she received instructions from her lord and master to go to the station, recover the bag, and give

it into the possession of "Jacob Johnson," with whom Schmidt had kept up a correspondence, hoping ultimately to succeed in obtaining a share of the stones which young Plant had appropriated. Johnson had been very well provided for, but his cupidity overcame his discretion, and the same remark applied to Schmidt. Thinking that there was no longer any danger, he ventured back to the British metropolis to have an interview with "Johnson," in the hope that some scheme might be devised for recovering the precious stones for which they both yearned. Schmidt promised to pay "Johnson" one thousand pounds in solid hard cash if the stones could be found, and he was allowed to take them abroad. And so, after much discussion, they decided to journey to Dartmoor, where young Plant was serving his sentence. They hoped by means of corrupting one of the warders of the great prison to communicate with the convict, and induce him to reveal the hiding-place of the stones. In this they were perfectly successful, but after that I spoilt their little game. And thanks to Schmidt's fatuousness—which, however, was only in consonance with the ways of nearly all criminals—I was enabled to give justice her due.

There is little more to be told as far as I am concerned. Looking upon "Blanche Stanley" as I did, as more sinned against than sinning, I am glad to be able to record that she was acquitted. But young Schmidt and the elder Plant both got their deserts. Fallowfield was also arrested and imprisoned, while the wretched warder who had betrayed his trust was severely punished.

As the Belgian police had a heavy account to settle with the baron and his lady-love, those two



worthies were destined to languish for many years in Belgian prisons. Much of the enormous amount of property found in the baron's residence in Brussels was claimed by the legitimate owners, and about half the diamonds of the tiara were recovered by Prague, Hamblin, and Co. What had become of the others was never known. They had probably been disposed of in some eastern country. To those that were recovered, Prague, Hamblin added some very choice specimens, so that a new tiara was manufactured, and in due course presented to her majesty, the Empress of Brazil.

## THE RIDDLE OF BEAVER'S HILL.

WHAT a wild night that was; the 17th of February, 1868; a savage night truly, and awful with the demoniacal fury of the warring elements. From somewhere in the frozen regions of the Northern Pole a hurricane had swept, bent on destruction, and in its giant might had so lashed the Atlantic that the ocean, like an untamed beast, broke into a maddened roar, and upheaved its mountainous waves as if to wash from the heavens themselves, the shuddering stars that seemed to peep affrighted from the rents in the ragged scud. It was an exciting night for mariners, and that cruel, bitter storm wind added largely to England's wreck-roll.

Plunging into the troughs, and anon rising on her stern until she seemed to stand perfectly upright, the staunch steamship *Roman Empire*, struggled bravely on towards her destination—Liverpool. She had come from the West Indies, and was heavily laden with sugar, principally. But her builders had builded her well and strong, otherwise she would surely have sunk to the bottom of the ocean as a wreck on that tempestuous night. And yet even the *Roman Empire*, sturdy and strong as she was, had

very hard work indeed to hold her own against the giant forces that were contending on the black waste of waters. Her engines could only be kept at half speed, because, when she "plunged her nose into it," as sailors say, her stern was raised clear of the water, and then the screw revolved at such a fearful rate that it threatened to shiver the strong ship to match-wood; consequently she was "slowed down," and all that could be done was to keep her from falling into the troughs of the seas.

It was an anxious time for every one concerned in the management of the ship; and the skipper—a thorough "salt," from the crown of his head to the soles of his boots, had sleeplessly kept watch and ward on the bridge for a spell of at least twenty-four hours. Indeed, it is nothing more than his due to say that but for his splendid seamanship, and his tireless vigilance, it is doubtful if the *Roman Empire* would have weathered that historical storm. For though she was well-built and well-found in every respect, yet she was overloaded, as the "Plimsoll Mark" had not then been invented, and sugar being a dead weight, is a bad cargo in stormy weather, especially if it should happen to get damp, for then it becomes a sodden mass, and plays mischief with the pumps. However, on this occasion, nothing of the kind happened, and though the good ship laboured, and strained in a somewhat alarming way, she proved her toughness; while the eagle eye and quick brain of the splendid skipper were ever on the alert, and the way he handled his vessel, during, admittedly, the fiercest storm that had swept the Atlantic for a long time, was a thing to be remembered. It may be said without irreverence that that

one man held the lives of a hundred fellow-beings in his hand, for all told there were a hundred persons on board, including sixty passengers, of which number I formed a unit.

The business that had taken me to the West Indies was a very curious one, as I shall presently show; but my introductory remarks are not an unfitting prologue to the thrilling story I have to tell.

Accustomed to travel as I was, I cannot say that I was particularly incommoded by the pitching and tossing of the sorely tried steamer; and I infinitely preferred the wind-swept and sea-washed upper deck to the stuffy "below," where many of the unfortunate passengers groaned in the agonies of sea-sickness, or moaned and prayed from an all-absorbing fear that their hours were numbered and the ocean bed would be their grave. For myself I had obtained the captain's permission to be on the bridge, where a weather-screen afforded me some shelter from the lashing of the wind and the spume of the sea. I did not attempt speech with the brave mariner who did his duty so faithfully and well; but my interest was divided between watching him and the gigantic waves, which every now and then seemed to make a furious charge at us, as if determined that we should be overwhelmed. But the lordly craft would spring up, and, as it were, leap on to the crests of these tumbling rollers, and then, shaking herself free of the tons of water that poured upon her decks, she snorted out defiance from her salt-encrusted funnel, and still ploughed on.

It is a natural assumption that every human being in that little floating world was anxious that his life should not be extinguished in those dark and troubled

waters; and maybe many a one breathed a silent prayer that he might be spared to greet once more the dear ones who watched and waited for his coming. But there was one exception. Up the after companionway a haggard care-worn man crept; and, glancing fore and aft for a brief moment, he sprang out on to the wet and slippery deck, falling as he did so; but, quickly regaining his feet, he climbed on to the rail by the mizzen shrouds and hurled himself forth into the night of death. I witnessed the act, and actually, or in fancy, I heard the cry of wild despair that went up to the watching stars from the lips of the poor human atom as he rushed out of life. Needless to say he was seen no more; nor was it possible to do anything whatever to try and rescue the suicide from the grave he sought. It was a startling and terrible act, and the *mise en scène*, heightened its dramatic effect.

The night waxed and waned. When morning came a glaring sun lit up the storm-tossed sea with a strange light; but the gale had spent itself, and its traces were only visible in the wild waste of waters, beneath which one soul-stricken wretch of our number had found that rest which the world cannot give.

With the dawn and the lessening of the wind our engines were put at full speed; ere the day was done the sea calmed down considerably, and without further incident worth chronicling we pursued our passage, reaching Liverpool in due course, having to pick our way "dead slow" up the Mersey, through a thick, yellow unctuous fog that seemed to wet one's very marrow. It was in hideous contrast to the bright sun, the blue sea, the brilliant colouring, and

the splendid atmosphere of the West Indies. At three o'clock in the afternoon we dropped anchor abreast of the landing stage, and the voyage was over. With this introduction I will proceed with

### THE STORY.

Somewhere about the year 1855, a gentleman named Charles Garton Pennefather, returned to England from India, where he had spent many years of his life in the service of the Hon. East India Company. Although in the prime of manhood he had been compelled to throw up his appointment, owing to an affection of the eyes, for which he had tried all sorts of treatment without deriving any benefit; and as the complaint seemed incurable, and he was incapacitated from carrying out his duties, he was called upon to send in his resignation, which perforce he did, and he left India with a pension. Not that he needed the pension, for he had been a shrewd speculative man, and had managed to acquire something like a fortune, though he bore the reputation of being "niggardly."

Up to this period he had remained single, and his closer blood relations being dead, he took a strong dislike to all the others under the impression that they were anxious to get his money from him. Soon after his return home he purchased a small property situated on Beaver's Hill, near Southampton, of which town he was a native. On this property he erected a quasi-bungalow, and endeavoured to keep up his Anglo-Indian habits, which he was enabled to do to some extent, as he had brought home with him two Indian servants, though one died soon after, and the other, fearing the climate, returned to India three

years later. He was a fretful, fuming sort of man; the ophthalmic complaint from which he suffered, together, no doubt, with a "curried" liver, helped considerably to sour his temper; and he anathematized the climate, the people, the country—everything, in fact. His irritability caused him to lead a sort of isolated life, and he was looked upon as not only eccentric, but disagreeable in the extreme. There can be no question that this was a somewhat harsh judgment, for it would appear that he was really a kind-hearted man, and could be generous when he liked.

After some years, feeling his isolation and loneliness; and the affection of his eyes becoming so bad that he was threatened with total blindness, he advertised for a lady housekeeper, and amongst the applicants was a lady only a year or two his junior. Her name was Laura Shapcot; she described herself as a childless widow, her husband having been dead about two years. Mr. Pennefather, being satisfied with her, engaged her, and six months later, to the astonishment of his neighbours, he led her to the altar, while four months from that time, to the horror of Mrs. Grundy, the lady presented her liege lord with a son.

Of course the white-souled ones and the stainless puritans shrieked in chorus with the dreadful Mrs. Grundy, and equally of course the Anglo-Indian and his household were shunned. The immaculate people who had been in the habit of visiting ceased to do so; and the whole neighbourhood, with a hypocritical uplifting of the eyes, exclaimed, "Shocking." But all this tabooing and outpouring of righteous wrath on the part of the self-elected saints did not affect

Mr. Pennefather; or, at any rate, if it did, he was able to preserve an outward display of profound indifference, mingled with supreme contempt. The lady he had chosen to share his fortunes, gave him every satisfaction apparently, and he was contented and happy.

Six months passed, when a second sensation was furnished by the Pennefather establishment as food for the gossips. Mr. Pennefather and his wife had gone to London, mainly with the object of consulting an eminent specialist with reference to Mr. Pennefather's eyes. Two days after they had left home, they were requested by telegraph to return immediately as something had happened. They thereupon took the next train back to find that the "something" was nothing more nor less than the mysterious disappearance of their infant child.

From the information that was gathered at the time, it appeared that one evening, the nurse-maid, whose special duty it was to attend to the baby, left him sleeping calmly in his cot, which stood in a small room leading out of Mr. and Mrs. Pennefather's bedroom. One of the other servants had undertaken to keep an eye on the baby until the nurse's return; she having accompanied her sweetheart to the theatre. The servant who was deputizing for the nurse went upstairs—according to her own account—two or three times, and each time found the child sleeping serenely. But at last, to her horror, she noticed, on paying another visit to the room, that the cot was empty, the window open, and the child gone. Instantly she gave an alarm; the grounds were searched, but no signs of the child were discovered. That he had been carried off was clear enough. The

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window of his room, which was a French window—opened on to a verandah. Against this verandah a ladder had been reared, and by that means the abduction had been effected. The ladder belonged to the establishment, and was generally kept reared against the wall in the stableyard.

When Pennefather and his wife arrived they were in a great state of mind. By some inconceivable fatuousness the servants had given no notice to the police, consequently whoever had taken the child away had got a good start. Nevertheless the most strenuous efforts were made to discover the whereabouts of the child, and a considerable reward was offered for any information that would lead to his recovery. But everybody remained dumb. No tale nor tidings were forthcoming.

It was thought probable that a tribe of gipsies who had long been encamped on the common, might have had a hand in the business, and means were taken to find out if that was so; but the result was the exoneration of the gypsies from any suspicion. This of course increased the mystery, for it was difficult to suggest the object which had induced any one to steal the infant.

The people who conducted the inquiry at the time came to the conclusion that whoever was guilty of the crime, it had been well premeditated, and carefully planned; while a knowledge of the premises, no less than of the movements of the family, had been acquired. The whole business in short pointed to a very cunning scheme, the real purpose of which could not even be guessed at. Necessarily all the means that could be thought of were adopted with a view to recovering the stolen baby; but these

means proved unavailing. The search was fruitless, and those people who had at first been most sanguine, had to confess that they were absolutely baffled. They complained, and very properly so, of the delay that had taken place between the discovery of the abduction, and the police being informed of the crime. This delay had unfortunately enabled the wretches to have a good start, and it was only too obvious they had availed themselves to the fullest of the opportunity thus afforded them of getting clear.

As may be supposed, the affair caused a good deal of gossip in the neighbourhood. Indeed, for the proverbial nine days Southampton was greatly excited over it, and speculation was rife as to the purpose which the abductors hoped to serve in carrying off the child. Naturally there were many theories, all more or less extravagant, some even ridiculous; but strangely enough the consensus of opinion amongst the general public was, that the gypsies on the common had had a hand in it. As I have already stated, however, the most careful and searching inquiries had failed to elicit anything calculated to justify suspicion being directed against the nomads.

Mr. Pennefather felt the loss of his child very keenly; and when months passed away and there were still no tidings of the missing boy, the poor father became broken-hearted. A year elapsed, and then one day Mr. Pennefather received an anonymous letter, which bore the Paris postmark, and ran as follows:—

“Sir,—You will no doubt be glad to learn that your child is well and happy. Since the day he was taken from you for a special object, he has been well

taken care of and looked after; but the time has now come when he will be restored to you on certain conditions. The first of these is, that you send a bank draft for the sum of five thousand pounds, drawn upon the credit Lyonnais at Paris, and made payable to Albert Duc. Secondly, you send the advice, and authorization to draw the money, addressed, Monsieur Albert Duc, Poste Restante, Paris. Thirdly, that three days after the money has been remitted you allow your wife to journey to Paris. You will notify by what train she will travel; and on her arrival at the Gare du Nord, a lady will meet her, and hand the child to her. No questions will be asked and none answered. And lastly, you must give a solemn assurance in your reply that when you have got your boy back you will let the matter rest there, and that you will not be a party to any legal proceedings.

“On the fourth day from your receiving this your answer must reach the writer. It must be sent to Albert Duc, Poste Restante, Paris. Should a favourable answer not be sent you will never again hear anything more of your child. The conditions herein laid down are unalterable. You must adhere strictly to them if you want the child restored to you.”

This audacious and impudent attempt to blackmail necessarily incensed Mr. Pennefather, whose feelings had already been cruelly outraged. Unfortunately for himself, however, he allowed his indignation to betray him into a foolish act; for, moved by a sudden impulse of wrath, he wrote off immediately to “Albert Duc, Poste Restante, Paris,” saying, that he would not pay any such sum as that demanded; and

peremptorily requesting the restoration of his child without further delay.

Having posted this rash answer, the next thing he did was to place in the hands of the police the letter he had received from Paris. It is almost inconceivable, but nevertheless true, that the local authorities could not make up their minds for some days whether to act upon the letter or not. And at last, when they had let a precious week slip by, a letter was sent to the chief of the police in Paris, enclosing a copy of the one from "Albert Duc," and requesting that steps might be taken at once to try and discover "Albert Duc," if such a person existed.

This fatuous proceeding, as might be supposed, resulted in nothing. Instead of liming the twig for the wary bird, which could have been caught, no doubt, with a little clever finessing, they frightened it away, and in such a bungling manner had this been done, that "Monsieur Albert Duc" took good care to lie *perdu*, for he was obviously not such a fool as to be caught with chaff, at any rate, not chaff of that kind. A cleverly contrived snare might have trapped him; but the chance of doing so was allowed to be lost. The subsequent excuse advanced by those who ought to have known better was, that the letter from Paris was looked upon, in the first instance, as a stupid hoax. How people in their sane senses could have come to such a conclusion it is difficult to understand. It ought to have occurred to the meanest intelligence that the writer of the letter knew about the abduction of the child, or he couldn't have written as he did write. And though, assuming, that he was not himself the guilty party, his arrest must have led to very important results.

And that he might have been arrested was proved by the fact that he actually called at the Paris post-office, and got Mr. Pennefather's letter, which, of course, put him on his guard, and he was too cautious to run into a net after that.

When six months more had gone another strange thing happened, and that incident was the means of connecting me, in my official capacity, with this romance of real life. But, firstly, a slight digression is necessary by way of explanation.

It happened that Mr. Pennefather was somewhat eccentric in his habits. Amongst other whims and oddities he had a contempt for and dread of lawyers. He referred to them as "The Forty Thieves—and more: or the Legalized Bands of Robbers." This was severe, though no doubt there are plenty of people who will be ready to say it was not a whit too severe. Owing to this prejudice he would never have any dealings with a lawyer if he could possibly avoid it. He overlooked the fact that, as lawyers make the laws, it is necessary to appeal to them to interpret the law. Laymen are not allowed to know anything about the law except when the paying time comes; then they know too much. Nevertheless a lawyer is a necessary evil, and like other evils in the world that cannot be done away with, he must be borne with. However, Mr. Pennefather had his own views, and he declined to have a legal confidant and adviser. The result was he was in the habit of keeping in his house valuable securities which most men would have entrusted either to their banker or lawyer. But Pennefather would do neither. He preferred to have his bonds, his property deeds, his share scrip, and such-like within reach of his hand; and so he

kept them in an ordinary wooden box under his bed. What follows will now be more intelligible to the reader.

It came about that Mr. Pennefather and his wife were again in London, and during their absence their house was once more entered, and the box of securities I have referred to, was carried off.

The poor gentleman was distracted when he heard of his fresh loss, and for some days was threatened with very serious illness. Within three days of the robbery I was requested to go down to Southampton and see Mr. Pennefather. He was in a very excited state of mind, but gave me a clear and graphic account of what had happened, and, of course, told me the story of the abduction of his child; and all the details as I have set them down for the interest of the reader.

On commencing my investigation I came to the conclusion that the same person who carried off the child had a hand in carrying off the box of deeds. Precisely the same means were used in each instance to effect an entry into the house; that is, a ladder was reared against the window of the small room connected with Mr. Pennefather's bedroom. In both cases also the crime synchronized with Mr. and Mrs. Pennefather's absence in London. The deduction from this fact was, that the guilty person or persons were well posted up in the family arrangements. I was led therefore to suspect some of the household, which consisted of three female servants and a man-servant, whose duties consisted of keeping the garden in order and looking after a horse and trap.

My researches, however, in this direction, did not encourage me to believe that I was on the right

track. I couldn't detect a single suspicious circumstance in connection with the doings of the servants. The women all seemed respectable enough. They were natives of the town and bore good characters. One of them—the cook—a woman turned fifty, had been in the service of one family for nearly thirty years, before taking service with Mr. Pennefather. And the man-servant had been fifteen years with an old Indian officer in the town of Winchester, and only left on the death of his master. The other two servants—housemaid and parlourmaid—were exemplary young women as servants go, and there was not a suggestion that they had played any part in the robbery.

I next turned my attention to the nursery-maid, who had been discharged soon after the child was stolen. She had simply been sent away because there was no longer any use for her services, and at this time she was with a family living out at Northam, a suburb of Southampton. I sought an interview with her, and found her a very intelligent young woman; but there was nothing in her manner or what she said which caused me any suspicion. Indeed she impressed me with her entire truthfulness, and I could detect no *arrière pensée* in what she told me. Moreover, I took certain steps to convince myself that she was really truthful, and nothing came to light calculated to throw doubt upon her honesty.

The result of these preliminary inquiries was to leave me without a clue, and I turned my attention to trying to divine a motive for the crime. Now the abduction of a child does not fall into the category of an ordinary or common crime, especially in such a case as the one I am recording; and though the

letter sent from Paris seemed to indicate that "black-mail" was a prime factor in the calculation, I came to the conclusion, after much cogitation, that the strong probability was, that the stealing of the child in the first instance was an act of revengeful spite. And necessarily this suggested the question, "Spite against whom?" That question was pregnant with a far greater importance than would appear at the first blush, and I endeavoured to get something like a satisfactory answer.

If the proposition, that vengeance was the impelling motive which led to the abduction of the baby; it is easy to conceive that the same guilty person who had planned and carried out the abduction, having failed to exact blackmail, as he tried to do, proceeded to the second act of the crime from sheer and malicious spite. This again confronts us with another proposition. The criminal must have had considerable knowledge of Mr. Pennefather's habits, and been perfectly well aware that the box of valuable documents was kept under the bed. The elements of mere chance could not be taken into account in this matter. For an ordinary burglar would scarcely have concerned himself about a box of deeds when he could have swept into his bag property, which could be infinitely more readily negotiated. For the thief must have been a dullard indeed if he did not understand that any attempt to deal with those documents would place him in very serious danger of capture.

The working out of the foregoing argument left me but one answer. That answer was—that the motive *was* vengeance. This was an advance, because, having determined the motive for an action, the



issue is considerably narrowed, and your search must necessarily be directed to finding the person most likely to be possessed with such a motive.

And now I come to another feature of the case which at once presented itself to me. It was this. Both a man and a woman had been engaged in the abduction. Of course others might have been directly or indirectly concerned, but a man and a woman were indispensable factors to any sensible and logical conclusion. For while it was the act of a man to mount the ladder, enter the room, and carry off the baby, it was a woman's act to tend to so young a child. In this latter respect a man would have been altogether at sea, and would soon have betrayed himself. Therefore it was certain, absolutely certain, that he had a woman as his confederate. And the rational theory was, that one man and one woman were all who were concerned in the plot.

This again narrowed the issue somewhat, and I had to concentrate my energies to trying to locate the man and woman. The woman, no doubt, was subordinate to the man, and under his influence; consequently, it was important to learn, if possible, what man was likely to have had ill-feeling against the Pennefathers, and the cause that had led to that feeling. From the effect to the cause was a step; but it was a very broad step, and seemingly beset with difficulties. But on the basis of my theorizing, I set to work, and in the process of time was encouraged to believe that I had struck a trail which would lead me ultimately to very important results.

As I have already pointed out, in trying to solve a problem of this kind, it is most important that a feasible motive should be determined, for the motive

is the key, and without it one must fumble about in the dark, and fail to get any results. Now, the motive, as I have endeavoured to show, was malice or revenge, or both. A wretch, male or female, in whom were some of the worst of human vices, had conceived this wickedness in order to gratify a contemptible desire to retaliate for real or fancied wrong. Of course, we cannot get away from the hard fact that revenge is a most potent factor in human composition. Indeed, it may almost be referred to as one of the strongest of human passions. It declares itself in some characteristic way in every race and every nation. Amongst the Corsicans the passion of vengeance is kept alive for generations in the same family, and leads to terrible scenes of bloodshed and wrong. Amongst the nomadic tribes of the desert, the wreaking of vengeance has led to the extermination of tens of thousands of persons. In Italy it frequently causes a man to become a midnight assassin, often for a mere trifling wrong, or mayhap, for an unintentionable slight. Now, in England—cold-blooded, unpicturesque, unromantic England—a wrong has to be resented in a different way, and that way is of necessity vulgar, stupid, and useless. There used to be an unwritten law that if a man insulted you, you must knock him down. But this is a risky proceeding in such a law-ridden, prosaic country as ours is; and if one ventures to resort to this means of expressing his feelings, the chances are he finds himself in the grip of a clumsy and stupid policeman, who hauls him before some self-opinionated judge, only a little less clumsy, and a degree less stupid than the policeman himself. Let it not be supposed that I am trying to justify knocking a man down; that is

very far indeed from my intention. But since the gentleman's privilege of being able to call an insulter out, so that you might pit your skill with sword or pistol against his no longer exists, one has often to endure unmerited wrong in silence, for neither the knocking-down process nor horsewhipping is recognized as a legal means of redress. And a man, although he may have suffered grievously, will often rather bear the ills he has than risk those of the law.

The foregoing remarks may appear to be digressive, but they serve to illustrate, if not to enforce, the point I have been urging: which is that the Pennefathers had made an enemy, and that enemy took the only means that occurred to his commonplace mind, to gratify his desire for vengeance. It was, of course, a natural sequence to the line of argument I had pursued, that I should seek to learn from Mr. Pennefather if there was anybody he knew of who was likely to be actuated by malice of the kind I have indicated. In accents of piteous distress he assured me that he knew of no one.

"On my return to England," he said, "after many years' residence in the East, I found that most of my nearest kith and kin were dead, while those who remained were needy and grasping, and imagining that I had returned with the wealth of Cræsus, they began to fawn upon and flatter me. I was not likely to be deceived by this, and I naturally resented it, for I hate duplicity and sham."

"And do you think that amongst those people any one was likely to have resorted to such means to gratify his spite?" I asked.

"No, I do not," he answered decisively. "I run my eye over them all, and there isn't one who seems to

me in the least likely to be guilty of so dastardly a crime."

"And what about your wife's relations, Mr. Pennefather?"

"Oh, I don't know anything about her relatives. She was a widow when I married her."

"A widow?"

"Yes. She came to me as housekeeper. I subsequently made her my wife; and I am bound to say she has been a good and devoted wife."

This conversation was instructive and suggestive, as far as I was concerned. I gathered one thing, at least, and it was this: although in some respects Mr. Pennefather might justly be described as eccentric—for he held many ideas which were not altogether in common with the majority of people by whom he was surrounded—he was single-minded, and was not what is generally termed shrewd, nor far-seeing. There is no doubt his partial blindness had produced a taint of misanthropy; and his temperament was such that he could not rise superior to a calamity of that kind. His spirit of self-dependence was by no means strong; and though he had been spoken of as "disagreeable," I did not find him so; but he expressed a strong objection to the strained conventionalism and the narrow-mindedness of English society generally. He quoted some lines to me in this connection, which very clearly expressed his views. The lines were—

"They eat and drink, and scheme and plod,  
They go to church on Sunday;  
And many are afraid of God,  
And more of Mrs. Grundy."

I found that his wife in many respects was his

antipodes. She was a sharp-tongued, bigoted, talkative woman. And I am bound to say she did not give me the impression that she wore her heart upon her sleeve. Her manner was brusque and discourteous; but I attributed this to her want of breeding. Mr. Pennefather had described her as "a good and devoted wife," and no doubt he had found her so. But she had gone to him as his housekeeper; that argued that she was in a needy position at the time. Then he married her, and she found herself in what was by comparison affluence. And I surmised that she was too "cute," to use an Americanism, to quarrel with her bread-and-butter; for if she had not preserved a semblance of being good and devoted, I inferred that he was just the man to have made her life exceedingly uncomfortable.

I felt, that it was advisable for many reasons, to discuss with her my theory of the two crimes having been committed by the same person, and of both being the outcome of malice. She seemed surprised. Indeed, "surprised" is a mild term; she was, as the saying goes, thunderstruck, and exclaimed sharply—

"Who do you think would bear such malice against my husband as to do a thing like that? It is true that his acquaintances are rather a queer lot; but I can't imagine them doing a thing of that sort."

"And what about your own acquaintances, madam?" I asked.

This made her very angry. She wanted to know if I wished to insult her. I told her no; whereupon she allowed her temper to betray her into saying things that would have been better left unsaid.

"My family connections are quite as good as my husband's," she exclaimed.

"I do not wish to institute any invidious comparisons between your relatives and his," I responded. "What I am trying to do, and what I am necessarily concerned in doing, is to clear up the mystery surrounding the whole affair. For at present it certainly does look very mysterious. I think you will admit that."

"I think it's the most mysterious thing I have ever known," was her reply. "But I don't see how you can expect me to clear up the mystery."

"I am not aware, madam, that I have given any indication that my expectations tended that way."

"Perhaps not; but the way you question me is offensive."

"I am sure I am very sorry if it seems so. I have certainly no desire to be offensive. But, if I am correct in my surmise that at the bottom of this business is some strong personal feeling on account of real or fancied wrong, it is by no means illogical to suppose that the culprit is in some way connected with your family."

"With my family?" she cried excitedly.

Well, when I say your family, I mean your own and your husband's family. It doesn't seem in accordance with common sense to suppose that this deed has been committed by an utter stranger."

"Then you must look to my husband's family, not to mine," she said, with a haughty tossing of her head. "There is no doubt he has a good many enemies."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it's true."

"And how do you account for his having made enemies?"

"Oh, well, the fact is he is rather an oddity. He

has lived so long in India that he doesn't like the ways of the people here, and he offends them."

"How does he offend them?"

"Because he has no discretion. He speaks out, and says what he thinks."

"I consider that a virtue," I replied.

"Well, perhaps it is; but it doesn't do to let your tongue wag too freely. You shouldn't always tell people what you think of them. You make enemies, you know."

"Yes, that is true," I answered; "but still, I see nothing in your argument that would justify one in supposing that because your husband is blunt of speech and outspoken, somebody has tried to resent it by stealing his child and his property."

"Oh, well, I don't know," she said cynically; "some people are bad enough for anything."

"That is perfectly true. But it would want more than you've advanced to lead me to believe that there isn't a much deeper motive to be sought for as the cause of the crime, than a mere dislike to your husband's ways."

"Very likely there is."

"Can you not suggest a cause, Mrs. Pennefather?"

"No, I can't, unless it is that he won't give his relatives money."

"That would indicate that the crime is the result of spite."

"Of course it does."

"Do you know any one who would be so spiteful as that?"

"No, I don't."

"Neither on your side nor his?"

"No," she answered, quite angrily, as though she

bitterly resented the suspicion my questions betrayed. Of course, I made every allowance for her. She was a stupid woman in many respects, with an over-rated opinion of herself; and she was incapable of discussing the matter calmly and dispassionately.

"Now, Mrs. Pennefather," I said with emphasis and point, "I suppose, as a mother, you wish to learn the fate of your child?"

"What do you suppose I am? Of course I do!" she exclaimed; and then, her feelings overcoming her, she broke out into a fit of passionate weeping, and it was some time before she could bring herself under control again. And when she did, she added, with a sob, "I should be a great brute, I think, if I wasn't concerned about my darling child. I am sure my heart is broken about him."

"And yet you are angry with me because I am trying, according to my lights, to try and discover a clue that may enable me possibly to restore your child to you."

"I am not angry," she responded, still fretting; "but it's not nice to have one's relatives suspected of a thing of this sort."

"And yet, if one doesn't suspect a relative, or acquaintance, at any rate, it is difficult to define a motive that would prompt an utter stranger to do such a thing. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know what to think," she answered, again giving way to tears.

"But I do; and my thoughts are very definite. The person who has carried out this cruel crime is some connection of the family, either on your husband's side or yours. And you might so far help me as to give me such particulars of the relatives as would



enable me to exercise my own judgment in determining the measure of probability that this person or that may have been guilty."

She was evidently greatly overcome. Her feelings had got the better of her again. But at last she exclaimed—

"I'm not going to point to any one. I won't bring any one under suspicion."

"You were a widow when you married your present husband?" I remarked.

"Yes, I was," she answered angrily. "But surely that wasn't a crime."

"Oh dear no," I replied, with a smile. And, after a pause, I added, "Now, isn't it possible, Mrs. Pennefather, that amongst your late husband's relatives——"

She did not give me a chance of finishing what I intended to say; but, with something very much like a shriek, she exclaimed—

"It's monstrous, it's infamous—that's what it is! You have no business to accuse my people——"

"I do not accuse your people——"

"Yes, you do; and it's abominable. I won't hear any more. I will have nothing more to say to you."

She was by this time very excited, in fact, quite hysterical, and I deemed it prudent not to pursue the subject farther then; and though, subsequently, I tried to reason with her, and endeavoured to point out the absurdity of her taking offence where no offence was meant, I could not make anything of her. Nevertheless, I did get certain clues that led me in a direction which I had not up to then suspected. As what follows, however, forms a distinct episode in itself, and is altogether very remarkable,

I think it will add to the dramatic interest of the story if I put it into the form of a sort of

### EPILOGUE.

Reader, have you ever been in the West Indies? Have you ever left our gloomy England when fog, slush, damp, were everywhere? When the leaden skies, the grimy air, the unutterably awful sense of depression which prevails over the land, produces in him who loves brightness and sunshine, a mental distress, which makes life all but unendurable. If it has been your fate to turn your back on your own country—which has one of the worst climates in the world—at such a time, and glide out to where the sea winds blow, and sailing south and west towards the setting sun, you will, if you are constituted as I am, have rejoiced, and been disposed to sing a song of praise. At any rate, that was my frame of mind as I left the City of Dreadful Night at the end of November, 1867. It had been a fearful month, and it seemed to me that there was neither comfort nor happiness to be found in all the land. Even the usually pleasant town of Southampton was suggestive of a place of wailing for lost souls. Snow and sleet drove through its streets. The dead grey sky enveloped the roofs of the houses, and shivering people hurried along looking pinched, blue, and woe-begone. Without loss of time I hastened from the train to the splendidly appointed steamer *La Plata*, where, in the comfortably-appointed saloon, I enjoyed a well-served dinner. A few hours later we were slowly picking our way down the Solent towards the Needles, and about eight o'clock, saw the light on the rocks at

Alum Bay, sending forth its gleams of warning over the black and tumbling waters. The next morning, although there was a wild sea and stormy wind, the sun was shining from a blue sky, and I began to breathe. For some weeks I had been taxing my faculties in my endeavour to read the riddle of Beaver's Hill. Its complicated nature had, I confess, given me a good deal of trouble. And, as was my habit in all cases I interested myself in, I had given much time and anxious thought to it. The result was, I was a little bit "hipped," and the gloomy weather had not tended to cheerfulness by any means. Possibly somebody may exclaim, "That a man whose business it is to deal with the problems of human wickedness has no business to have nerves, or be sensitive to external influences, atmospheric or otherwise." That, however, is a matter of opinion. Speaking for myself, I am sensitive, and have nerves; and as I have always been a sun worshipper, I am distressed if at all times I cannot flop down on my bit of carpet and show my devotion to the god of day.

I had taken my passage on board the *La Plata* in the name of Robert Braithwaite, and I encouraged an inference that I was engaged in commercial pursuits. There were a good many passengers on board, merchants, commercial travellers, and others, and I fancy they regarded me with some suspicion, as I studiously avoided talking "shop" with them, and shop was the principal subject of conversation when the men assembled in the smoking-room.

It is not necessary for me to dwell upon all the little incidents of the voyage. The *La Plata* was an excellent ship and made an unusually rapid passage.

My destination was Jamaica, and my errand was in connection with the Beaver's Hill mystery. I cannot express the feeling of delight I experienced as we neared the West India Islands, and the water under our keel became bluer and bluer, while from the cloudless azure sky the brilliant sun shone in all its regal splendour, and the air was delicious, balmy and health-giving. To any one who lands in the West Indies, having left England in the winter, the transformation is simply marvellous, and unless the traveller be absolutely unimpressionable, he will be filled with new and strange emotions. Particularly must this be the case, when one has never before been in a tropical land; for the wonders of the tropics cannot be imagined. They must be seen to be fully understood.

For a few days I took up my quarters in Kingston, and secured lodgings in a house situated about two miles outside of the town. My window looked on to a garden of brilliant flowering plants which presented a mass of flaming and beautiful colours; it was a wild tangle of beauty without one single inharmonious shade. Beyond this fair garden was an orchard, in which mingled banana plants, and orange and lemon trees. On the oranges and lemons fruit and blossom appeared together. The fruit was like golden and yellow balls, and the flowers made the air heavy with their rich fragrance. However, much as I am tempted to go into descriptive rhapsodies about the scenery and the beauties of the place, I must resist it, for stern business had taken me there, and not pleasure.

I was interested in learning something about a certain Charles Hancock, who, I had good reason to

believe, had arrived in Jamaica some time previously, and was engaged in business of some kind. My inquiries were placed in quarters where such information as I required was likely to be afforded me. And before long I had ascertained through a bank in Kingston, that Mr. Charles Hancock had bought an interest in a small sugar and cotton estate, close to a place called Mandeville, situated in the parish of Manchester, in the county of Middlesex. This sounds very incongruous in connection with the tropical land of Jamaica in the West Indies; but so it is; and it serves to prove that our sturdy old forefathers, who went forth as pioneers to these isles of beauty, did not allow their love for the mother country to die out. Mandeville, as I was informed, was about seventy miles from Kingston. A railway was projected as far as a place called Porus, within twenty miles of Mandeville; but, in the mean time, one had to travel by coach drawn by a pair of miserable mules.

As soon as I had made my preparations I started upon this journey. The whole route was one of surprises; every turn brought into view some new beauty, and as we rose towards the heights, glimpses of a panorama were revealed which rendered one dumb with an admiration that could find no expression in words.

After passing Porus the road leads through the mountains, and the character of the scenery changes to wild grandeur. Coffee plantations are passed, and the glossy leaves and crooked branches, twisted into fantastic shapes of the coffee trees, present a very curious appearance. As the steaming, sultry lowlands are left, the air grows cooler and thinner, and

a delightful feeling of exhilaration is experienced. The body seems to be relieved of a weight. The mind is clear, and the pulses throb with a sense of new life.

In due course I reached my destination. I found Mandeville a village of some pretensions, and surrounded with cotton and sugar plantations. On the outskirts of the village, in a fairly large house, Mr. Charles Hancock lived with his partner, a gentleman whose name was Hulton, who was married to a mulattress, and had a large family. Hancock was a young man, by no means prepossessing. His face bore traces of dissipation, and there was a wild, nervous restlessness of the eyes which was far from pleasant. I gathered that since his arrival on the island he had been very ill, owing, as I inferred, from his constitution having been destroyed by wild living. He was haggard and pale, and gave me the impression that, in the ordinary course of nature, he was not likely to make old bones.

As I introduced myself to him in company with two members of the Mandeville native police, he was lounging in a deck-chair on the verandah of the house, and was smoking a long cheroot, while beside him stood a glass of the crude, fiery rum, which is made on the plantations from molasses and the waste and dirt of the boiling-houses. This crude stuff is terribly deleterious, and the negroes often go raving mad through it. For a new-comer and white man to drink it, is to court disease and certain death. As I approached him I raised my hat, and said—

“Mr. Charles Hancock, I believe?”

He turned his bleared eyes upon me, and without altering his position, or attempting to rise, he drawled out—

"Yes—that's—my name."

"That is not true," I answered.

His pale face grew a shade paler at these words, and he visibly started.

"What do you mean?" he demanded angrily.

"I mean that Charles Hancock is not your name."

As he sat upright in the chair, he said, "And pray who are you that you dare to tell me that I am a liar?"

"You will learn soon enough," I answered. "I repeat now that your name is not Charles Hancock, but Francis Fulton."

He sprang to his feet, and exclaimed fiercely, as the cheroot he was smoking fell from his trembling hand—

"You lie. What is your business here?"

"My business is to arrest you," I said.

At these words he seemed to stagger, and into his pallid face a frightened look came that was pitiable. In one corner of the verandah was a gun, and I saw his eyes wander to it. But I stepped quickly between him and it, and said—

"I hold a warrant for your arrest."

"On what grounds?" he stammered, as though his breath was leaving him.

"On two charges. Firstly, for abducting the infant child of Mr. Pennfather of Beaver's Hill, Southampton. Secondly, for entering his house and robbing him of certain valuable deeds and documents."

"It's all false," he jerked out, glancing about him nervously, as though he contemplated making a dash. So I laid my hand upon his shoulder, and said—

"At any rate, I have come all the way from England to effect your capture. I have all the necessary

documents and authorization to justify the course I am pursuing. If I have made a mistake I must take the responsibility."

He shook himself free from me, and in hoarse tones exclaimed—

"I tell you it's a lie, a damnable lie, and you've committed a stupid, idiotic mistake."

He made a movement as if he contemplated seizing the gun; but I threw myself upon him, and beckoning to my colleagues, who had stood apart, they rushed up to my assistance. But the three of us had our work cut out, for the wretched fellow fought with the desperation of one who fights for his life. His physical strength, however, soon gave out, and, faint and exhausted, he perforce yielded. His partner now came upon the scene, and to him I explained the situation. As may be imagined, he was very much distressed, for he himself was a man of unblemished reputation, and was held in great respect all over the island.

Having secured my prisoner, we lodged him in the jail at Mandeville, and as I was afraid he might attempt something desperate, I had him closely watched and guarded. My next step was to take charge of all his effects, his papers being duly sealed up in the presence of a government official. After this, as soon as ever I could make arrangements, I took him down to Kingston, where he fell so ill that he was threatened with brain fever, and for some weeks he was a patient in the hospital, where he was treated with every consideration and kindness, but watched and guarded.

During his illness and convalescence he had preserved a sullen silence, and though I had caused his



name to be entered in the hospital books as Francis Fulton—which was his correct name—he refused to answer to it, and insisted that he was not Francis Fulton, but Charles Hancock. At length the doctors certified that he was fit to travel, and I made preparations for the journey back to England, securing two berths in the steamer *Roman Empire*. Fulton continued to protest his innocence of the charge I preferred against him. However, I had laid all the evidence I had collected before the magistrate in Kingston, and had got his warrant endorsed by the governor, to remove the prisoner, and about the end of January I took him on board.

As I had reason to believe he was a desperate fellow, and capable of resorting to any violence, I put him in irons, and took every precaution necessary for his safe guarding. The weather was glorious, and as the *Roman Empire* called at many of the other islands, the trip was most enjoyable, except for my wretched prisoner. But after the first few days he seemed to have become reconciled to his position. His sullen demeanour gave place to real or assumed cheerfulness, and he bandied jokes with me. He repeatedly said that when the “stupid blunder” into which I had been led, was proved, I should be glad enough to sue to him for consideration.

As the weather was hot I used to allow him on deck for several hours a day. He not only improved in health, but began to look quite different compared to the pallid, miserable object he was when I first saw him at Mandeville; he also got gay and frisky, and, as he had a good tenor voice, he amused the passengers with songs.

At length the vessel, having completed her business

in West Indian waters, began to steer north and east, and the isles of beauty were soon left astern. Before half our passage home was completed we fell in with boisterous weather. Heavy gales, tremendous seas, wild snowstorms, and bitter cold were in striking contrast to the genial climate, and glittering seas we had left behind.

Fulton now began to complain of ill health again; his cheerfulness left him, and he gave way to brooding melancholy. He kept to his cabin which adjoined mine, and could only be entered by passing through mine. As there was no doubt that he was suffering greatly; moreover, as the doctor certified that he was really seriously ill, he was allowed a good many indulgences, which otherwise would not have been accorded to him. And so far as I was justified in doing so, I did what I could to ameliorate the irksomeness of his position. He looked so terribly ill, haggard and worn again—just as he did when I saw him at Mandeville; in fact, he was a good deal worse than he was then, that I began to fear he would not live to reach Liverpool.

As we neared our destination the weather got worse and worse, and on the 17th of February we encountered that terrific storm to which I refer in the opening pages of this narrative. We seemed to be in the very focus of it, and I do not think there were many persons on board, who did not regard the *Roman Empire's* chances of escape as very small indeed. At least, I am sure that was the view that all the passengers took, and though many of them were old travellers, they were prostrated with seasickness and terror. My prisoner seemed to suffer very much. The violent motion of the vessel affected

him; but everything was done for his comfort that could be done. The doctor's opinion was that he was suffering from severe nervous prostration, but he did not consider he was in any immediate danger, nor did he think he had homicidal tendencies.

Although I knew Francis Fulton was a scoundrel of the deepest dye, unless I had been grievously deceived, I could not help but sympathize with him in his sufferings, notwithstanding that I was strongly of opinion myself that he was a prey to remorse. But I had not reason to suppose that he contemplated taking the most effectual means a man can take to escape from human justice. Nevertheless, before going on deck during the height of the storm, I took the precaution to lock the cabin door, so that he was practically a prisoner in the cabin. But previous to leaving him, I asked him if he would like to get up and go on deck. His answer was that he was too weak and too ill. And he added, with what struck me as an air of braggadocio—

“Besides, if the blooming ship is going to the bottom, and it strikes me she is, I would rather be drowned here like a rat in a trap. I'm not a bit afraid of dying—not me. A fellow can only die once, and I don't know that it matters much how nor where he dies.”

“I don't think myself that it matters,” I answered, “if a man has nothing to reproach himself with. But unless I'm very much mistaken, you have a good deal to answer for, and it might be worth your while to try in the future to atone for the past.”

He broke into a bitter laugh, and said—

“You are taking too much upon yourself. You are not my judge.”

"I am not," I answered, "and am not setting myself up as your judge in any way."

"Then why do you speak of my past?"

"My remark was merely a casual one."

"But what do you know of my past?"

"A good deal."

"Only from hearsay."

"That is your way of putting it," I replied. "Unless you have been frightfully maligned and cruelly belied, your past has been a very black one."

He laughed bitterly again, and remarked—

"It's the old story of kicking a man when he's down. But tell me, how much do you know of my past?"

"That is not a question I can or will answer," I said. "It is not my place to discuss a matter of that kind with you. In due course, a proper tribunal will inquire into it, and it will be for you to clear yourself, if you can, of the terrible charges hanging over your head."

He made no further remark, but groaned, and burying his face in the pillow, I believe he wept.

I was glad to get away, and felt relieved and seemed to breathe freer when I got on deck. It was not long after that conversation in the cabin of the tossing ship, that conscience-smitten Francis Fulton forced the lock of the door, and only partially clad, crept up the companion-way, and, with an agonizing wail of awful despair, plunged into the raging sea, and thus added to his many crimes the crime of self-slaughter.

\* \* \* \*

It now remains for me to explain who Francis Fulton was, and how it came about that I journeyed to the

West Indies to effect his arrest. The reader already knows the theory upon which I worked. I was sure that malice or revenge was at the bottom of the crime, and that the criminal must of necessity have had some connection with the family. When my inquiries made it evident that the connection was not on Mr. Pennefather's side, I turned to the wife's, and began to look into her antecedents. In the course of time I discovered that she had been married many years before to a man by the name of Fulton. This man was a lawyer, but had been struck off the rolls for misappropriating a large sum of money which had been entrusted to him for investment. After that he became a pariah, and, sinking lower and lower in the social scale, he at last committed suicide by poisoning himself in a wretched and squalid London lodging. His wife, who was the daughter of a tradesman in a small way of business, was left with one son, who, at the time of his father's death, was ten years of age. Her people were not well circumstanced, but they managed amongst them to send young Fulton to school, where he remained for some years, but the only way in which he distinguished himself was by indolence, lying, and pilfering from his school-mates. When he was about sixteen, he was expelled, and his grandfather got him a situation in a large tea warehouse in London. He only remained there for two years, when he was discharged on suspicion of having robbed his employers, although they did not prosecute then. He then seems to have gone out to Australia, where, so far as could be gathered, he led a very wild life. Returning home in broken health and with empty pockets, he sponged upon his mother for a long time ;

and as long as he could get anything from her, he would not work. Mother-like, she seemed to have regarded his faults as very venial ones, and was always ready to sacrifice herself for him. At that time she was housekeeper to a gentleman—a widower, who had an invalid son. This son was ordered to take a trip to the West Indies, and Mrs. Fulton prevailed upon her employer to allow her son to go with his son as his attendant. The gentleman's son, after travelling in the West Indies for some time, died there; and though it was never actually proved against him, it was tolerably certain that Francis Fulton appropriated all the dead man's property, including a large sum of money. While in the West Indies he made the acquaintance of a young Frenchwoman, who had occupied the position of a nursery governess in an English family, but, her employer having died, she was about to return to France. She had saved a little money, and Fulton induced her to marry him, the marriage being solemnized in the Roman Catholic Church at St. Domingo. He then went to France with his wife, but seems to have given offence to her relatives, who ultimately refused to have anything to do with either of them. Getting into pecuniary straits again, he applied to his mother for assistance, and for some time she helped him. Then he and his wife—who seems to have been corrupted by his evil influences—went to London. But he was as dissolute and as depraved as ever. When his mother married Mr. Pennefather, he paid her several clandestine visits, and by this means got to know the house well, and a good deal about Mr. Pennefather's habits. When his mother brought another son into the world, he displayed great jealousy, and a strong

dislike for the baby. His dislike reached a climax when his mother told him that she would no longer have anything to do with him. This brought out all the worst traits of his decidedly bad character, and in conjunction with his wife, who was entirely under his evil influence, he planned the daring and dastardly scheme of abducting the child in the hope that he would be able to get a large sum of money from Mr. Pennefather.

The child was taken to Paris, and when Fulton failed to get money as he expected to do, he decided on the second crime of stealing the deeds. He had previously been in communication with his mother, and was well posted up in her movements; but she, weak and foolish woman as she was, did not take any means to expose him as she ought to have done. She allowed her affections for this erring offspring to blind her to her duty to her husband.

Immediately after the robbery, Fulton succeeded in hypothecating the bonds and other securities, thereby raising a considerable sum of money. He at once started for the West Indies, leaving his wife in Paris, and on arrival in Jamaica he purchased an interest in the estate where I found him when I began to pick up his trail, and to work out the problem. I lost no time in going to Paris, where I learnt that the unfortunate baby had died; its death being due, no doubt, in a large measure, to neglect. By this time Mrs. Fulton had become very embittered against her husband. She had found out his worthlessness, and had come to realize his wickedness. It was entirely through her I discovered his whereabouts.

There is little more to be told. When he found he was trapped, he saw that his game was played

out. He had believed, no doubt, that he had done a clever thing in going to the West Indies and that he was perfectly safe there. But he afforded another illustration of the stupidity of criminal ways ; and if further proof of this was wanted, it would be found in the fact that, on his arrival at Kingston, he opened an account with the bank there, and actually deposited with the bank some of the stolen deeds. It was by this means I traced him to Mandeville, for beyond knowing that he was in Jamaica, his wife knew nothing further.

Mr. Pennefather succeeded in recovering the whole or nearly the whole of his deeds and other securities, but not without considerable trouble and expense. But, of course, nothing could compensate him for the loss of his child ; and when he learnt, as he was bound to learn, how his wife had deceived him, he sent her about her business, and, disgusted and broken-hearted, he realized his property and returned to India, where he shortly afterwards died.

Francis Fulton's career and terrible end emphasizes in a peculiarly forcible manner that there is no rest for the wicked ; no peace for the evil-doer. And that it is better far, ten thousand times infinitely better, to live on a crust honestly earned, since happiness never yet came out of crime-acquired riches.



## *A RAILWAY MYSTERY.*

ONE October night Sir Peter Elsworthy left the Euston Station, London, by a late train for Birmingham, in the neighbourhood of which town he resided. Sir Peter was a little over seventy years of age, but was a well-preserved, hale, hearty man. He was a constant traveller between London and Birmingham, and was well known on the line. He was a wealthy man, being largely interested in various commercial enterprises, including collieries, shipping, and the like. He also owned extensive property both in London and Birmingham. On this occasion he had paid a hurried visit to the Metropolis to transact some business with his lawyers, and on leaving their offices in Gray's Inn, he carried with him a despatch-box containing some very important documents and securities, which he said he wished to look through himself so as to master the details of certain holdings. His solicitors, Tait, Hainwell and Co., were anxious to send the documents down to his residence by special messenger, but he would not hear of it; nor would he allow the box to be conveyed to the station for him. He was a very self-reliant man, and had a strong objection to its being insinuated in any way

that he was getting old. He reached Euston a few minutes before the train was timed to leave, and having hurriedly partaken of a glass of ale, which was a favourite beverage of his, he went on to the platform, and the guard of the train opened the door of a first-class compartment for him, and he got in, saying to the guard as he did so—

“I hope there won’t be any other passengers in this carriage, as I want to read some papers going down, and to be quiet.”

“I don’t think you’ll be troubled, sir,” was the guard’s answer. “We don’t pick up many first-class passengers by this train. But, anyway, I’ll try and keep the compartment for you.”

The train steamed out of the terminus punctually, and wasn’t timed to stop anywhere till it arrived at Rugby. In due course Rugby was reached. There Sir Peter alighted and went to the refreshment room, where he had another glass of ale and a sandwich. On returning to his compartment he found a lady ensconced in one corner. The guard himself had opened the door for Sir Peter to alight, then new duties had taken him away elsewhere. On returning he was surprised to see the lady in the carriage, and on asking her politely where she was going to, she produced a first-class ticket from Northampton to Birmingham, *viâ* Rugby, where she had had to change, the train from Northampton having come in half an hour before. She did not speak, merely showed her ticket, and of course the guard could not request her to get out. She wore a thick veil and large ulster, and in the rack she had deposited a hand-bag.

The train left Rugby several minutes late, and midway between that station and Birmingham it

almost came to a dead stand owing to a luggage train being in front, and it was quite twenty minutes behind its time at its destination. There the guard, no doubt with a view to a possible tip, hurried to the carriage occupied by Sir Peter Elsworthy, when, to his horror, he found Sir Peter lying on the floor in a pool of blood, which flowed from a frightful wound in his forehead. He was quite insensible; in fact, seemed to be dead. The lady who had got in at Rugby had gone, but Sir Peter's despatch-box was still there, and, strangely enough, in the rack was the hand-bag the guard had noticed at Rugby.

The officials were immediately notified of the occurrence; a doctor was hastily summoned, and it was then found that Sir Peter was not dead. He had, however, received a terrific blow on the forehead, probably from a life preserver. The blow must at once have stunned him, and it had produced concussion of the brain. Although Sir Peter's carriage was waiting at the station to convey him to his home—Mobberley Hall—two miles out of the town, the doctor regarded the case as so serious that he advised an immediate removal to the nearest hospital, and the coachman was despatched with all haste to acquaint the family with what had happened.

It is a somewhat remarkable thing, but nevertheless a fact, that during this time no inquiry was made about the lady who had joined the train at Rugby. The guard, of course, was the man who should have endeavoured, without a moment's loss of time, to ascertain what had become of her. But the shock of finding Sir Peter on the floor so upset him that he lost his head, as the saying is, and so forgot all about the mysterious female passenger.

By the first train the following morning I left for Birmingham, a special messenger being sent to me by a luggage train, which passed through Birmingham at two o'clock in the morning. He arrived at my house in time for me to make some hurried preparations, jump into a hansom, drive to Euston, and catch the train with only a few seconds to spare. The officials on the line were quick to recognize that the case was one calling for very prompt action indeed, and Sir Peter's family had suggested that I should be sent for.

The particulars, as I have given them above, were what I quickly gathered, and I saw, as everybody else of course saw, that the veiled lady who had joined the train at Rugby, must be found. I need scarcely say, perhaps, that the telegraph wires were busily employed in sending information to various points; but the day passed, no arrest was made, and the mystery deepened. Unfortunately, Sir Peter continued in a state of insensibility. A serious operation was performed during the day, but did not relieve him; and the doctors held out little hope of his recovery.

The carriage in which the outrage was committed, had been taken to a shed and left untouched, and I had an opportunity of making an examination of it. It was what is known as a composite carriage. There were two first-class compartments in the centre, and a second at each end. Sir Peter and the lady were the only first-class passengers. One second compartment was empty, the other was occupied by two gentlemen, an old lady, and a young one—mother and daughter as was subsequently ascertained; while the two gentlemen were both commercial travellers.

Not one of these four persons, however, was aware of anything unusual in the next compartment, nor did any of them see the woman get in or alight. The guard's description of her was that she was rather stout, and seemed well dressed; but beyond that, and saying that she was closely veiled and wore an ulster, he could go no further.

The despatch-box was found with the keys in the lid, and some documents were on the seat. These facts suggested that Sir Peter was reading and examining his papers when attacked. It was impossible to say until a list was received from the lawyers whether the contents of the box were intact or not. Nothing had been taken from the pockets of the injured man. His massive gold watch was of considerable value, and he had nearly ten pounds in loose cash in his pockets, besides a note-book with some bank-notes in it. As his property was untouched, it was difficult to understand why the unfortunate gentleman had been assaulted so desperately. When the lawyers sent through a list of the documents he had taken from their office, it was found that nothing was missing. The mystery was thus made the more incomprehensible. The bag which had been left in the rack by the strange woman, was found to be a lady's dressing-bag, the bottles and other things being fitted with plain silver tops. In the bag were two buns, from one of which a large piece had been bitten. There was also a pocket-handkerchief without any name on it, a hair brush and comb, a lady's powder-puff, a well-worn purse, containing a sovereign, a half sovereign, and some loose silver. One of the bottles was half full of scent, and there was a tooth-brush in the case. These things, with two exceptions,

constituted the contents of the bag, and in the absence of monogram on the silver tops, and name on the handkerchief, there was nothing likely to be of any use as a clue. The exceptions I refer to were, a tobacco-pouch filled with very coarse shag tobacco, and a briar-root pipe, with the mouthpiece bitten through, and looking as if it had been gnawed.

The problem which confronted the authorities in connection with this strange outrage was, I think it will be freely admitted, a very difficult one. It was obvious that it ranked quite apart from ordinary cases of the kind, for there seemed to be such an utter absence of definable motive. If the papers had been stolen, or the portable property on the person of the injured man carried off, robbery would at once have been set down as the motive. But nothing whatever had been taken, and this fact made the purpose of the outrage the more inscrutable. Indeed, the whole affair was admitted to be one of the most remarkable railway mysteries that had occupied public attention for years. From one end of the country to the other the "Sensation" was the common topic of conversation. The social position of the injured man, together with all the circumstances of the case, gave more than ordinary dramatic interest to it.

On the third day from the time he received the dreadful injuries which had imperilled his life, Sir Peter Elsworthy recovered consciousness, and the doctors were then able to say he would live. But it was very soon seen that the mind was apparently a blank. He did not seem to recognize any one about him; and when spoken to a bewildered expression came into his eyes, and he appeared like one who

was labouring under the effects of a potent drug which had stupefied and dulled the senses. The doctors were concerned about this. They feared that the brain had been permanently injured. Nor was that to be wondered at. The wonder really was that he lived at all, for he had been struck with such tremendous force over the left eye that a portion of the skull was literally smashed in. The injury had been inflicted, probably, with a very heavy life-preserver, wielded with great strength. The surgeons were compelled to remove a considerable portion of the bone, and resort to the operation known as trepanning. But though this had saved the poor man's life, the effects of the great shock to the brain was to produce a kind of idiocy, and it was soon ascertained that the unfortunate patient had forgotten everything. He could not ask for the most simple article by name, and he failed to recognize his wife and children. Although he was over seventy, Sir Peter was a very powerful man, with a splendid physique that indicated great muscular strength. The inference, therefore, was that he had been struck suddenly and stunned at once; otherwise he would surely have made a struggle for his life. Necessarily, the difficulties of the case were enhanced by the inability of the sufferer to give any information which might have afforded a clue.

The police, of course, worked upon their own lines; and in the blood-curdling and sensational reports that appeared in the papers it was stated that "Although the police are very reticent, they are sanguine of being able to solve the mystery; it is believed they are already in possession of certain clues which will ultimately lead to very important results." This was

the liner's way of putting it. Your liner is a fearful and wonderful person, and since "copy" must be ground out, he does not for a single instant hesitate to draw upon his imagination when facts fail. Of course there was great rivalry amongst the Press Agencies and the big newspapers to get information; while the very journals which are so fond of deprecating all kinds of "sensationalism," and go into hysterics over a so-called sensational novel, revelled in this dreadful story of blood, and dished up every morning for their readers the most gruesome and harrowing details. In fact, nothing seemed too horrible for them; and so for days and days the country was thrilled with varying versions of "The Railway Mystery."

In the mean time Sir Peter Elsworthy had been removed to his home, but unhappily showed no signs of returning intelligence. He remained in the same dazed condition, and was as helpless as a child.

Mobberley Hall was a beautiful, quaint Elizabethan mansion, and Sir Peter's household was a large one; for he had been married twice, and had children by both wives. His second wife, who was a young woman, had borne him two sons and three daughters, who were all at home. In addition, a daughter by the first wife, who was a widow with four children of her own, lived under her father's roof; and there were also two sons of the first family. They were both in business in Birmingham. Such a large family necessitated a large staff of servants, and in addition to the ordinary female domestics to be found in such an establishment, there were a butler, a footman, a page-boy, coachman, stablemen and gardeners. My connection with the affair was in a private



capacity. I had been requested by the wife and sons to do what I could to solve the mystery, consequently I carried out my work quite apart from the police, who, even at the end of a fortnight, were utterly without the faintest shadow of a clue, and the public began to say that the mystery would remain a mystery for all time. Very many ingenious theories were suggested; but not one, according to my thinking, that would work out logically.

As in the Beaver's Hill Mystery, so in this case, I at first thought that underlying the outrage was personal spite. Of course the two cases were by no means on all fours; but Sir Peter Elsworthy not having been robbed, it was not altogether easy to define a feasible motive. Now, I have always urged that one of the fundamental principles underlying the art of crime detection, is the defining of an adequate motive. In a case where robbery follows on assault or murder, the motive is clear enough; and should a man be murdered and no robbery follow, it is not unreasonable to suppose that revenge was the operating cause producing the effect. But under any circumstances I maintain that it is of the first importance that the motive should be determined; for when you have got your motive, you may begin to look about for the person most likely to have been actuated by that motive.

At first I did think that Sir Peter's life had been attempted out of revenge, and I made cautious inquiries amongst the members of the family, with a view to determining what likelihood there was of any one cherishing such deadly hatred as to be impelled to attempt to destroy the poor man's life by beating his brains out. For various reasons, it seemed to me

that this theory of revenge was a feasible one, and I followed it out.

The younger of the two sons I have referred to was his father's favourite, and seems to have been better acquainted with the old gentleman's movements than any one else. So I sought an interview with Thomas in his office in Birmingham. The young man seemed very much affected, and spoke of his father in the most affectionate terms.

"My father was not what might be called a communicative man," he said, in answer to a question I put to him, "and it was very rarely he talked about his affairs. But he was singularly self-reliant, and when once he had made up his mind to a thing it was most difficult to move him."

"Do you know what his particular object was in bringing the documents away from his solicitors?"

"Well, I gathered from certain things he said to me, that he was desirous of acquainting himself with the particulars of some properties he has scattered through Warwickshire. And he thought that the best way to do that was to carefully peruse all the documents himself."

"Was his sole object in going up to London to get possession of these papers, do you know?"

"Ah, that I cannot tell you. As I have already said, he was a reserved and reticent man, and though perhaps I was more in his confidence than any other member of the family, he did not tell me very much. I am inclined to think, however, that he had other business in London. He had been there several days."

"Was he fond of good living?"

"Yes."

"And company?"

"Yes."

"Do you know anything of the class of company he associated with?"

"Well, my father was a gentleman, and kept the company of gentlemen."

"And ladies?"

"That I cannot tell you. I have no doubt he knew many ladies; but I do not think he had any connections which he would have been ashamed of owning to."

"That is your personal opinion?"

"It is."

"But you will admit that it might be otherwise?"

"Of course I understand the drift of your questions. They are justified no doubt by the circumstances; for anything that may tend to elucidate the mystery is justifiable. But while I admit the possibility of my father having some connection which he would prefer should not be generally known, I do not think it is the least probable."

"But please tell me why you doubt the probability?"

"Because I have every confidence in his rectitude and honour. He was a reticent, and in some senses a secretive man; but he was also a conscientious man, and I feel sure he would not have pursued any line of conduct that would not bear the searching light of day being thrown upon it."

"Then you think he had no enemies?"

"Oh, that is asking me too much. A saint, if he dwelt on earth, would have enemies."

"Unfortunately that is so; for the most upright, just, and considerate man that the imagination can

conceive cannot go through life without wounding some prejudices, or treading on somebody's corns. And some people are so small-minded, so full of evil, that very little indeed suffices to arouse in them enmity of an exceedingly bitter kind. But what I am trying to get at in your father's case is, the likelihood of there being some one who may have considered himself so grievously injured by your father that he purposely went out of his way to try and kill him."

"Candidly, I don't think it at all likely."

"You don't?"

"No. My father had always been looked upon as a kind and sympathetic man; and though in the conventional sense he may have had enemies, there is no incident in his life, as far as I know it, which could have caused any one to wish for his death."

"Have you any theory of the crime yourself?"

"None. I am perfectly puzzled. If his property had been stolen, a motive would at once have been apparent. But robbery does not seem to have been the object of the outrage."

I have recorded this interview with Thomas Elsworthy, because it is instructive, inasmuch as it serves to show the estimation in which Sir Peter was held by his family, and by all those who knew him. In spite of the opinion, however, I came to the conclusion that there was some secret in Sir Peter's life, which, if known, would give the clue to the outrage. Let it not be overlooked that his own son described him as reticent and secretive. Now, a reticent and secretive man is not he who wears his heart upon his sleeve, as the saying is. Your secretive man usually has some *arrière pensée*; and though in a general way

his conduct may be above suspicion, he is as likely as not to have some weak points. That is putting it in a mild way. The premise, therefore, was this. Sir Peter Elsworthy was a secretive man. Sir Peter Elsworthy, being a secretive man, might have done something at some time or other which had given mortal offence and led to the attempt upon his life.

On these lines I began to work, and I critically examined every detail in connection with the outrage, and worked the problem out thus—

The woman who got into the train at Rugby held a first-class ticket from Northampton to Birmingham. That woman committed the outrage.

Was the outrage the result of a sudden impulse, or was it premeditated?

It was premeditated.

My reason for thinking it was premeditated was that I had come to the conclusion the crime was an act of vengeance. Premeditation argued a conspiracy. At any rate the woman must have been well posted up in Sir Peter's movements, and have so timed her journey from Northampton that she was certain of getting the London train at Rugby. She would know that Sir Peter was in the habit of travelling first-class. And no doubt she took into consideration the strong probability that the night train at that time of the year would carry very few first-class passengers. Assuming my theorizing was correct, she must have been on the look-out at Rugby for her victim; she saw him leave the carriage and she at once took her seat. Although—if my argument was to be worked out consistently—she knew Sir Peter, he did not know her, or, at any rate, did not recognize

her owing to the thick veil she wore. I regarded that veil as purposely worn for the sake of disguise.

Now, the next question that it was necessary to answer, in constructing the theory was, At what particular point of the journey was the attack made?

Sir Peter left the carriage at Rugby. His despatch-box was in the carriage, and the box was locked then; for it was not reasonable to suppose that he would have left the box open during his absence. Rugby is at all times a bustling, busy station; and the box contained valuable documents; Sir Peter was too shrewd a man to have left them exposed. Soon after the train started again he must have opened his box and taken out some of the papers, for it will be remembered the keys were in the box at Birmingham, and some of the papers were on the seat. Between Rugby and Birmingham the train nearly came to a standstill owing to some obstruction in front. Had the outrage been committed then, and did the woman take the opportunity to escape?

My opinion was that she did. The stopping of the train, of course, was a mere chance, but it was one which the criminal availed herself of. My reason for thus thinking may be briefly given. The train was timed to stop at two stations; the first some little distance beyond where it almost came to a standstill. If my reasoning was sound, the would-be murderer, who had no doubt taken everything into consideration, very probably intended to slip away at the first station. She therefore lost no time after leaving Rugby in carrying out her diabolical purpose, and the slowing of the train was too favourable an opportunity to be missed. This might also account for the fact that she left her bag behind her. Now,

as regards that bag. It was by no means an unimportant factor in the calculation. It was a lady's dressing-bag, but in it were a tobacco-pouch and a pipe, the mouthpiece of the pipe much gnawed. Ladies do not, as a rule, carry in their dressing-bags tobacco-pouches and pipes. The pipe had been smoked by some one who had a nasty habit of biting the stem. It was an old pipe and had been long in use.

The last detail that had to be considered was, what weapon had the criminal used to effect her purpose? The medical evidence was to the effect that Sir Peter had been struck a sudden and terrific blow with a blunt instrument, probably a bludgeon or a life-preserver. A bludgeon—that is to say, a stick—could not have been so easily concealed as a life-preserver, and it would have attracted attention to her if a lady had been seen carrying one, whereas a preserver could have been easily hidden in the bag, and when done with hurled out of the window of the carriage.

I therefore decided that a life-preserver was the instrument; it was an exceptionally heavy one, and wielded with great muscular force. Only a very exceptional woman could have exerted this force; only an exceptional woman would have carried a life-preserver. I therefore came to the conclusion that the person who committed the outrage was not a woman at all, but a man, in disguise; and the tobacco-pouch and pipe certainly favoured this theory; and my deduction from the gnawed pipe was that the man who had smoked it was a moody, brooding sort of man, of great nervous irritability. This line of argument brought me of necessity to the question, what was the criminal doing in Northampton?

That is to say, how was it that on the particular day of the outrage he or she travelled from Northampton? Was he there by chance on that day, or was it his place of residence?

Having built up this theory I proceeded to act upon it, and I caused a very careful search to be made along the line, and for some distance from the line, between Rugby and the stopping place, for the supposed weapon; for it seemed hardly likely that the criminal would have carried it far after having effected his purpose. The search, however, was fruitless, and nothing was found. At this point nearly three weeks had elapsed, and with all the efforts put forth by the police not a trace of the criminal had been discovered; and in spite of the wide publicity given to the outrage through the medium of the Press, no one had come forward with a scrap of information likely to be of the slightest use. Of course there were—as there always are in such cases—any number of theories advanced by the amateur detectives, who spring up like mushrooms as soon as ever a great crime is committed and the police are baffled. These clever people, according to their own account, solved the problem without the slightest difficulty; but unfortunately for their cleverness, they didn't put the authorities on the criminal's track.

No assistance of any kind was obtainable from Sir Peter himself; for although his life had been spared, thanks to the vigour of his constitution, his mind was shattered. He recognized nobody, remembered nothing. An application I made to his family to be allowed to go through his letters, papers, diaries, etc., in the hope that I might find something to give me



a clue, was not entertained, although in other respects they were willing to render such assistance as lay in their power, and afford all the information they could, for they were very desirous of seeing the criminal brought to justice.

My next step was to seek an interview with Tait, Hainwell and Co., Sir Peter's London lawyers. These gentlemen corroborated what the son Thomas had told me as to Sir Peter's reticence and secretiveness. They described him as a somewhat peculiar and eccentric man; very self-reliant and self-opinionated. It was most difficult indeed to move him when once he had made up his mind. He was well versed in legal matters, and to a large extent liked to manage his own affairs; but as his property was extensive and much scattered, he was obliged to avail himself of legal assistance. He did not, however, as some men do, make confidants of his solicitors.

From London I proceeded to Northampton, and I wish it to be distinctly understood that, up to this stage, I had not obtained anything tangible to guide me in my efforts. I was acting entirely upon my theory. One thing I ought to mention, I had not allowed it to leak out that I believed the criminal to be a man in a woman's disguise; and it is a singular fact no one had suggested it. The police were scouring the country everywhere for a woman who was vaguely described as about five feet three in height, stoutly built, wearing a thick veil and an ulster. It was taken for granted, apparently, that she would go on wearing the veil and ulster indefinitely after the crime. The vagueness of the description was due to the fact that the guard of the train was the only person who could speak with any

actual knowledge, and he only saw the supposed woman as she sat in one corner of the carriage. Therefore he had not much chance of going into minute details. There was one other point which is worth mentioning. It was generally assumed, even by the police who ought to have known better, that the person who had committed the assault was an habitual criminal. I did not take that view, by any means. An habitual criminal would not have committed so desperate an assault for nothing. He would certainly have taken Sir Peter's money and jewellery; otherwise what was the *raison d'être* of the crime? Was it not clear, on the very face of it, that the whole outrage must have been planned? It was known that Sir Peter was travelling from London by that particular train; and the person who had assaulted him had come purposely armed with some lethal weapon, and had waited at Rugby for his victim, knowing that all the chances were in favour of Sir Peter being alone in the carriage. Indeed, chance seemed to have favoured the criminal throughout, so far as was known; and, having committed the outrage, he was enabled to get clear off and elude the vigilance of the police and public. That pointed to a certain cleverness coupled with caution, and it seemed to me to greatly strengthen my theory that the criminal was a man and not a woman. The disguise he had assumed had thrown every one off the scent, and he must have had a confederate in London who informed him of Sir Peter's departure from the Metropolis. On arriving in Northampton, I began to make inquiries in the proper quarters, with a view to discovering if Sir Peter Elsworthy had ever had any connection with the town, and in the course of time

it came to my knowledge that he had formerly owned some small property on the outskirts, but had sold it about twelve months previously. The property consisted, for the most part, of small houses, let to working people at weekly rentals. There was one house, however, that did not fall into this category. It was a very old, ramshackle place, standing in a lonely position on the road that runs between Northampton and Wellingborough, and about two and a half to three miles from the first-named town. It had at one time been portion of a farm. Then for several years it was a rural inn; but that had proved a failure commercially, and it was subsequently let to a man bearing the name of Joseph Winchlake Marsden, but locally and familiarly known as "Joe" Marsden. Joe had a wife and several children. It was generally understood that he was a bookmaker; but he was regarded as a respectable man, quiet, inoffensive, though of a reserved and brooding disposition. He paid but a small rental for the house, nevertheless he was a source of great trouble to Sir Peter Elsworthy—his landlord—as he was everlastingly worrying him to do certain repairs, though Sir Peter had given him distinctly to understand that as he intended to sell the property or raze it to the ground, he would not spend any money upon it. Joe Marsden, from all accounts, would seem to have been one of those unfortunate men who, in spite of whatever they do, do not succeed, but are for ever the victims of some ill luck. Joe bore the character of being an honest man. At any rate, no one was known to say anything against his character. Nevertheless he became soured by constant rebuffs, and fell into a state of desponding melancholy.

The house which he rented from Sir Peter Elsworthy he called "The Hovel." He had been heard to say repeatedly that it wasn't fit for pigs to live in. But still he stuck to it, owing probably to the little more than nominal rent he was called upon to pay. Soon after he entered on possession, diphtheria broke out in his family, and he lost three children. He complained bitterly to his landlord, who was induced to have the premises examined, when it was discovered that a cesspool was defective, and the ground round about had become saturated with sewerage; to this cause the outbreak of diphtheria was ascribed. Joe was told that if he liked to give up possession of the house, he could do so, although he had it on a three years' agreement, but he preferred to remain on. Some time later another calamity happened. One day, during a bitter winter, his wife was busy in the kitchen cooking, and her youngest child, an infant under three, was seated at the table in a high chair. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, the boiler exploded, killing the poor woman outright, and so injuring the baby that it died a week later. Joe Marsden was in Liverpool at the time, and a telegram was sent to him informing him of the fresh misfortune that had befallen him. From all accounts, he appears to have been utterly crushed; he complained bitterly about his landlord, saying that he was morally guilty of the deaths of Mrs. Marsden and the children. But Joe's cup was not yet full. About six months after the explosion his eldest son, who had fallen into bad company and was led astray, got mixed up in a burglary, was convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment, his youngest son went out to Canada, and his only surviving daughter proceeded to London,

where she obtained a situation as a barmaid. After this the unfortunate Joe Marsden sunk into such a condition of despondency that his mind was unhinged, and ultimately he became an inmate of the Northamptonshire Lunatic Asylum; but two years later he was discharged as cured.

By dint of persevering inquiry I gathered up the foregoing particulars of Joe Marsden, and there was sufficient in them to warrant me in endeavouring to still further trace Joe's career; for it will be remembered that I had advanced as a theory, before I had heard anything of Joe, that the person who committed the outrage was a man in woman's disguise, and I argued from the gnawed pipe found in the dressing-bag, that he was a moody, irritable, nervous man. Although at this stage there was a certain amount of presumptive evidence that Joe Marsden *might* have committed the crime, there was nothing which, from a legal point of view, would have been accepted as a justification for placing him under arrest. I learnt that he was very ill, and had been ill for a long time. Since his discharge from the Asylum he had occupied a small cottage in a poor quarter of the town. He paid a rental of four shillings a week for this cottage, and owing to his reserved and unsociable habits he was regarded by his neighbours as a recluse. He associated with no one, and no one seemed to know exactly how he managed to exist. Although people thought he was very eccentric, a good deal of sympathy was expressed for him, as they considered that fortune had used him badly.

Now, in trying to make Joe Marsden square in with my theory of the crime—and up to this point

it really seemed as if the finger of suspicion pointed directly to him as the criminal—there was one fact which confronted me as a stumbling-block. It was that Joe was a tall, gaunt man, with bushy beard and whiskers, and opinion agreed that he stood quite six feet high. It need scarcely be said that a tall man in female attire would be such a conspicuous figure that he could hardly fail to attract general attention. Now, the guard of the railway train by which Sir Peter Elsworthy travelled from London on the night he was so dreadfully injured, maintained that there was nothing conspicuous about the lady he saw in the railway carriage at Rugby. He averred that she most certainly was not a tall woman. This was a discrepancy which made it difficult to fit Joe in with the line of argument I had pursued. Nevertheless my opinion was by no means altered that the supposed woman was a man in disguise. At any rate, whether Joe Marsden was or was not the man I wanted, I was determined not only to keep a sharp eye upon him, as the saying is, but to ascertain if possible what his movements were about the time of the outrage.

I found that he was looked after, and his wants attended to, by an old woman known as Sally Parker. She lived in the same court, and managed to eke out a miserable existence by out-door relief from the parish. Sally was a garrulous old woman, who had outlived the allotted span, and bore evidence in her wrinkled, gnarled face, and her gaunt, bony frame, that her life had been a desperate struggle with hardships and poverty. Notwithstanding this, she had brought up a large family; was looked upon as a respectable person, and kindly and sympathetic to

boot. I deemed it desirable to interview Sally in her own house, a miserable, poverty-stricken place, and yet, withal, clean and tidy. Having introduced myself as one interested in Joe Marsden, I said—

“I understand, Mrs. Parker, you have been nursing Marsden?”

“Yes, I have. You see, he’s very poor, and I don’t like to see the old man left alone. And nobody else takes any notice of him.”

“How long has he been ill?”

“He’s been ill for months, master.”

“But not confined to the house?”

“Yes, he has.”

“You don’t mean to say he hasn’t been out of the house for months?”

“Yes, I do mean to say so. He haven’t a been out of his bed for weeks and weeks.”

“Is that really so, Mrs. Parker?”

“There bain’t no mistake about it. I’ve had the doing for him, and if I hadn’t looked after him the poor old chap must a gone into th’ work’us.”

“How does he live then?”

“Well, he ain’t got nowt but what his gal gives him.”

“You mean his daughter?”

“Yes.”

“Where is she? In London?”

“Yes.”

“In a situation, I suppose?”

“Yes. She’s a barmaid or something like that in an hotel.”

“Do you know the name of the hotel?”

“Well, I think I’ve heard the old man say it’s called the Albert—no, not the Albert, The Prince of Wales; that’s it.”

"And Marsden is really very ill," I remarked, wishing to draw the old woman out a little more.

"Yes; there be no mistake about that. And you see, he's not quite right in his head sometimes. He was in a 'sylum once."

"So I've heard."

"Are you a friend of his?" she asked abruptly.

"Well—I can't say that I am; but I am interested in him."

"Would you like to see him?"

"Yes; I should very much."

Sally at once attired herself in bonnet and shawl, and taking a key from a nail over the mantelpiece of her little room, she led me to Marsden's domicile. It was a small house, of a style peculiar to the Midland counties. The street door opened right into the parlour. Behind the parlour was a kitchen. From the kitchen a flight of stairs gave access to the upper storey where there were three small rooms. In the front one I found old Marsden in bed. The room was comfortable, and furnished in a homely way. In the grate a fire burned, and diffused a certain amount of cheerfulness.

"Here's a gent come to see you, Mister Marsden," said the old woman, by way of introducing me.

The invalid had been lying on his side with his back to the door; but he turned as we entered the room, and groaned as if the movement gave him pain. He was a peculiar looking man, with a morose, sullen expression of countenance, and a restless, nervous wandering of the eyes.

"Who's the gent?" he asked, with a sort of growl. I spoke for myself.

"I am interested in you, Mr. Marsden," I said,



"and Mrs. Parker suggested I should come and see you."

"Well, and what do you want now you have come?" he demanded grumpily.

"I understand you've been ill for some time," I answered evasively.

"Yes. I've been near a dead un. I think if it hadn't been for old Sally there, I'd a been in my grave afore this. I sometimes wish I wur dead."

"You oughtner to say that, Mister Marsden," remarked Sally, reprovingly.

"What for?" he rapped out fiercely. "Ain't I had trouble enough to make me disgusted with my life? Eh?"

"You're right, Joe—you're right about the trouble but you've no right to talk about wishing you wur dead. It's wicked, that's what it is."

"Wicked, be hanged!" exclaimed Joe, warmly. "What was I sent into the world for at all? That's what I want to know. I didn't come of my own free will, did I? And what have I done that I should always have had bad luck in the world?"

He had got excited, and as I saw that Sally was disposed to argue the matter from her point of view, I put a stop to it, by asking—

"What is your complaint, Mr. Marsden?"

"All sorts of things. I've something the matter with my legs. They seem to be wasting away, and I cannot stand long on 'em."

As he spoke, he thrust one of his legs from under the clothes in order to give me ocular assurance of his statement, and from the look of the limb I judged he was suffering from locomotor ataxy. I think that is what the doctors call the disease.

"Are you receiving medical attention?" I asked.

"No, I ain't. I ain't got no money to pay doctors," he growled.

"How long is it since you left your bed?" I asked.

"Well, I get up a bit mostly every day; but I ain't been outside this yere house for three blessed months."

He lay still after this for several minutes, and I couldn't get any response to my questions from him. Then he began to ramble and mutter incoherently, and Sally whispered to me that he often went off like that. I therefore took my departure, having left a little money with Sally for the old man's use.

I confess that I felt somewhat crestfallen as I realized that it was almost impossible for Joe Marsden to have committed the outrage on Sir Peter Elsworthy. Not only did I regard him as physically incapable of such a deed, but attired in female apparel he would have presented such a preposterous figure, that he must have attracted the attention of every one with whom he came in contact. Nevertheless I was not disposed to abandon the trail which I felt sure would ultimately lead me to success. I could not, after what I had learnt, believe that Joe was the criminal; but, on the other hand, I had an intuitive feeling that he knew something about the crime.

A week later I was in London, and one night soon after my return, a short, thick-set man, with a clean-shaven face, stood outside of a coffee-house talking to a well-dressed young woman. He himself was somewhat shabbily attired, and whereas she seemed a smart, well-set-up young person, he had a slouching, hang-dog appearance. Presently he kissed the woman; they separated; she hurried away, and he

entered the coffee-house. I followed soon after, and found him seated in one of the pew-like boxes of the coffee-house, partaking of coffee, bread-and-butter, and herrings. He was a remarkable looking man. He had a round head, a flat face, small eyes, a pug nose, a square chin, large mouth, and a peculiarly sullen expression of countenance. It needed no great amount of experience in facial and craniological study for one to determine that the man was of a sullen, fretful disposition, capable of dangerous outbursts of passion, and of a display of artful cunning, which might be difficult to guard against by any one who did not know him. More than that, he decidedly gave me the impression that he was a man who was exceedingly likely to give way to maniacal brooding over real or fancied wrong.

That was the estimate I formed of the fellow as I sat in the opposite box and studied him. He ate his food in a gross, sensual sort of way, and with a pre-occupied air. He was by no means a pleasant specimen of the human family; while his whole appearance and general manner were calculated to prejudice the most humane and philanthropic person against him. Perhaps it may be suggested that this was his misfortune and not his fault; that is, his looks belied him; but as the index indicates the nature of the contents of a book, so does a man's manner and appearance betray his disposition. If one had been a betting man he might safely have wagered that this fellow was cruel, selfish, unrelenting, unsympathetic, and objectionably egotistical. He seemed familiar with the people of the coffee-house, and the young woman who did the waiting chatted familiarly with him. When he had finished his meal,

and had picked his teeth with his fork, he called out to the girl—

“Lizzie, give me my key; I want to go to my room for a few minutes.”

This made it clear that he was a lodger in the house, and my interest in him increased. He was absent about twenty minutes; then he returned and gave the key of his room into the charge of the waitress again, and as he did so, she asked—

“Shall you be late to-night, Mr. Greenwood?”

“No; don’t think so. Back about twelve,” he answered curtly.

He went out, and I followed. He made direct for a tobacconist’s and purchased some tobacco, and pulling from his pocket a briar-root pipe, he filled it with tobacco, lit it, and walked to the Strand, where he mounted to the top of a Whitechapel ’bus. He did not alight until the ’bus reached Whitechapel. Then he entered a public-house called the Harp and Crown, where he spent the rest of the evening, returning to the coffee-house towards midnight. So much did I learn about him, and deeming it probable that there was a good deal more, which in the interest of justice it was well to know, I shadowed him closely. It did not appear that he followed any employment, so far as I could ascertain, and I came to the conclusion that he was a loafer who preferred idleness to work.

At the Prince of Wales Hotel, which was situated within a quarter of a mile of Charing Cross, a young woman was employed as a barmaid and assistant book-keeper. She was known as Ellen Jackson, and she bore a strong family likeness to the man I had been watching. Her face had an unpleasant cast about it, and there was the same sullen mien. She had,

however, a fine figure and dressed well. She bore a good character in the hotel, and was considered clever at arithmetic.

I took up my residence at the Prince of Wales for a few days, and became acquainted with Miss Ellen Jackson. The Prince of Wales was a quiet family house, much patronized by elderly gentlemen from the country, and Sir Peter Elsworthy had been in the habit of staying there, on and off, for several years, so that he was well known. As Ellen Jackson was the young woman who parted from Mr. Greenwood at the door of the coffee-house in St. Martin's Lane, I was necessarily interested in her for reasons that will presently be made clear. I had been watching her for some time—well, that is, for several days—and so it came about that I saw her meet the man who called himself Greenwood. They met in Hyde Park, strolled about for a little while, then took a 'bus down to Charing Cross, and finally parted at the coffee-house door as already described.

The reader of course will gather for himself that Ellen Jackson, as she preferred to call herself, was none other than the daughter of old Joe Marsden, and from what I have already stated, her reason for wishing to drop the name of Marsden will be understood and appreciated. With a convict brother, and a father who had been in an asylum, her way in life would have been hard had this been generally known; for the world takes precious good care that the sins of the father shall be visited upon the children, and a person, though he be as white as snow, and as blameless as a saint himself, will be pointed at with the finger of scorn, if it should be his misfortune to

be connected by family ties with some one who has broken the law and suffered for it.

Miss Ellen Marsden, *alias* Jackson, had been in her situation for a long time, and the manager spoke of her in terms of warm commendation. She was "trustworthy, honest, industrious." Under these circumstances, it was painful to me to be compelled, in the interests of justice and right, to take any steps that might compromise her good name, or imperil her position; but a cruel outrage had been committed, which had only narrowly missed resolving itself into murder. As it was, an old gentleman had been rendered imbecile for the rest of his life probably. It was a serious crime, and the law had to be appeased. At this stage of my inquiry, I had come within measurable distance of solving the railway mystery. Of that I was convinced, and it remained now to place the criminal in the hands of justice. The chain of argument which I had followed throughout the inquiry, led me, of course, into assuming it highly probable that Ellen Jackson—as I will continue to call her—had been down recently to see her father. By contributing to his support she had given evidence that she bore him affection, and what more reasonable than to suppose that, as he was lying very ill in his squalid home in Northampton, she had gone down to see him. I soon proved that this was actually the case, as in the course of a conversation with the manager of the hotel, I incidentally asked the question if he knew if Miss Jackson had recently been in Northampton. His reply was that about two months previous to this she had asked for a few days' leave in order that she might visit her sick father in Northampton. She was away for a week.

Armed with this information, I returned to the Midland town and sought out old Sally Parker once more. Joe had become worse, and she seemed full of sympathy for him, saying that she believed he would not last very long. I allowed her to talk for some time until she had pretty nearly exhausted the subject, then I chipped in with the question—

“By the way, Mrs. Parker, I understand that Marsden has a son, has he not?”

“He has two.”

“Do you know where they are?”

“The youngest is in America, I think.”

“And where is the other one?”

“I don’t exactly know where he is now.”

“Has he been in Northampton lately?”

“Yes; he was staying with his father up to a few weeks ago.”

“When did he go away?”

“Well, he went away sudden-like.”

“And Marsden’s daughter was here about the same time, was she not?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know much about her?”

“I don’t know much about any of ’em, ’cept the old man.”

It was clear to my mind that Sally spoke the truth, and she spoke without any suspicion that I was pumping her. It must be remembered that she was an uneducated woman, that she probably never read a newspaper, and knew nothing of the world beyond the squalid court where she passed her pauper’s life. Consequently it was not surprising that she should be ignorant of the outrage on the railway by which Sir Peter Elsworthy had so nearly

lost his life. Indeed, I convinced myself that she knew nothing at all about it. My purpose so far being served, I left her and returned to London. Although the mystery was not quite cleared up, I knew then that I was on the right track, and my next move was to produce the lady's dressing-bag which had been left in the railway carriage, in the presence of Ellen Jackson, and ask her if she recognized it. At first she said no; but I pointed out that the initials "E. J." were stamped on the leather outside, and that the bag must have been taken from her father's house in Northampton.

Of course *she* was not in ignorance of what was going on in the world. She read the papers, and knew all the details of the outrage, and now that bag came upon her as a revelation, and she recognized my purpose and object. She wanted to adhere to her statement that the bag was not hers; but she would have had to have been infinitely cleverer than she was not to have betrayed herself in such an emergency. I had sprung the surprise upon her, and her embarrassment betrayed her. At last she said the bag was hers, but that it had been stolen while she was in Northampton. I need scarcely say I did not accept that as a statement of fact, although at that moment I was not prepared to suggest how the bag got into the hands of the man who committed the outrage.

There was still another link to forge before the chain of evidence could be said to be complete, and that link had to be found in Northampton. I have previously pointed out that, in putting the pieces of the puzzle together, I had to consider the probability of an intimation of Sir Peter's departure from London being sent to the person who travelled with a



first-class ticket from Northampton to Rugby, and then got into the compartment of the carriage occupied by Sir Peter. To substantiate this I had to appeal to the Telegraph Company in Northampton. The telegraph system had not at that time been taken over by the Government. My investigation revealed that on the day of the outrage a telegram worded as follows was delivered at Joe Marsden's house—

*"He leaves by eight forty train."*

The telegram was addressed to "George Greenwood, care Mr. Marsden." The importance of this link will be at once recognized; and twenty-four hours later "George Greenwood," who was none other than Joe Marsden's eldest son, had been arrested, much to the consternation of his sister, and the amazement of himself.

From the evidence I had gathered up, and the further evidence that was forthcoming during the man's trial—for he was duly committed after magisterial inquiry—it was plainly established, by the plainest of circumstantial evidence, that "Greenwood," who had already suffered imprisonment for burglary, was the perpetrator of the outrage on Sir Peter Elsworthy. His sister had to appear and give evidence against him, unhappily for her, and it was elicited in the course of cross-examination that she had left some of her clothes, as well as her dressing-bag at her father's house. Her brother was about the same height as herself, and the things he appropriated of hers fitted him well enough. She declared that she had not the remotest idea her brother was going to commit a murderous attack upon Sir Peter. When she was in Northampton she had discussed with her brother the advisability of his trying to see Sir Peter, and making

an appeal to him for some pecuniary assistance for their father; and she understood from her brother that he would go to Birmingham for that purpose on her informing him of Sir Peter's return. She was questioned very severely as to why she should have thought it necessary to telegraph the information instead of writing a letter, and she replied that she was very busy at the time; that she hated letter-writing, and was in the habit of frequently communicating with her people by means of the telegraph. There was nothing remarkable of course about this, for it must be remembered her father had been a bookmaker, and in the habit of receiving many telegrams a day; and his daughter, who had helped him at one time in his business, had become familiarized with telegrams.

Now, whether she did or did not know that her wretched brother contemplated making an attempt on Sir Peter's life was not conclusively established. My own impression was that she did not, and when she stated that she thought he would go to Birmingham and see Sir Peter, she spoke truthfully. But one thing was made clear beyond all doubt; the brother was a morose, sullen, brooding man. He had cherished a bitter hatred against Sir Peter, to whom he attributed all the misfortunes that had befallen his family, and he had gone away from Northampton with murderous designs in his heart. Throughout his trial he maintained a sullen reserve, and seemed utterly indifferent to what was going on, and the defence set up was that at the time of the outrage he was not responsible for his acts, and there had been insanity in the family. This of course was proved by the fact of his father having been in an asylum. The end of it all was he was sentenced to penal

servitude for life, and six weeks later, he having developed acute mania, he was removed to a criminal lunatic asylum. The mystery about the female attire, and the weapon wherewith the outrage was committed, was solved before many months had passed. Some boys were fishing in a pond near Coventry, when they brought to the surface a bundle which they took to the nearest police station, where it was examined. It was found to consist of a woman's petticoat and dress, a long cloak, a bonnet and veil, and tied up with these things was a thick piece of cane about a foot long, with a ball of lead, weighing over a pound, fastened securely to one end.

On the night of the outrage the train had come almost to a dead stand near Coventry. By that time Marsden had done his dastardly work, and, taking advantage of the stoppage, he left the carriage, and made his way across the fields. On coming to the pond, he at once saw a way of ridding himself of his garments, so he made them up into a bundle, tied a large stone to the bundle by means of a red cotton handkerchief, and threw the lot into the pond.

Leaving the train suddenly and unexpectedly as he did, will account for his forgetting in his hurry to take the handbag he had brought from Northampton with him. And of course the fact of his being provided with the formidable weapon was conclusive evidence that he premeditated the outrage. He was cunning enough to refrain from robbing his victim, for he knew that by doing so he would be doubling his risk of detection.

The unfortunate Sir Peter Elsworthy never recovered his reason, and subsequently softening of the brain set in and killed him.

Of course Ellen lost her situation, and I heard that she went out to join her younger brother in Canada. Altogether the tragedy was a pitiable one, and brought into play some of the most repulsive and degrading traits of human nature. In conclusion, I may add there was no reason to suppose that old Joe Marsden was cognizant of his son's movements on the night of the outrage; but of course he knew of the outrage afterwards, for he was a great reader of newspapers. He did not live long after the son's conviction; he was found dead in his bed one morning. An inquest proved that most of his organs were diseased, but the immediate cause of death was the bursting of an artery in the brain.

### *A DESPERATE GAME.*

As nothing but a garbled version of this remarkable case has hitherto been made public, I propose now to relate the whole story, since there is no longer any necessity for concealment. At the time that what I am here about to tell occurred, every effort was made to hush the matter up, and, having regard to the interests involved and the high personages concerned, this was, perhaps, excusable. Of course, some of the particulars did leak out, for there are a certain class of journals that live by scandal, and their conductors seem to take a delight in serving up details of such matters, especially when the people implicated happen to move in a good social sphere. The aforesaid particulars, however, were all more or less inaccurate, for the rapacious liners, failing to get at the truth, exercised their imaginations—and a liner's imagination is usually of a singularly elastic nature—with a result that in some instances was cruel, and in others little short of absurd. I am not sure myself that it is wise to suppress the truth in cases in which the public may be said to have a direct interest, but one cannot withhold sympathy from those who, through no fault of their own, suddenly find their good names

besmirched by the indiscretion, folly, or wickedness of others.

For a long time it had been an open secret amongst those behind the scenes, and "in the know," to use a slang phrase, that the relations between the late Lord Malvern and his youngest son were of a very distressing and painful nature. The Hon. George Winter, the family name of Lord Malvern, had from an early age shown a refractory spirit and a disposition to run wild. He was a singularly handsome youth, very much petted and spoiled; and, having a delicate constitution, he was allowed to have most of his own way, with the inevitable result that he was ruined, and long before he was of age became a source of constant anxiety to his relatives. He was educated up to a certain point by private tutors, and was then sent to college, with a view to ultimately entering the diplomatic service. His college career, however, was marked by excesses which brought it to a premature close, and it was deemed advisable, in the interest of all concerned, that he should travel abroad for a considerable period. As he was the heir to riches and a great name, his friends were necessarily desirous that he should prove himself worthy of them, and they fondly thought that foreign travel might give a bent to his mind which would be the means of inducing him to amend his youthful errors, and uphold the dignity and honour of his family.

Under the care of a tutor he set out upon his wanderings, and during the succeeding three years visited most of the civilized parts of the globe. It appeared that while in France he made the acquaintance of a Major Delaporte, who at that time was

about thirty years of age. A very strong attachment sprang up between them, the consequence being Delaporte accompanied the young man on his travels. At the end of three years Winter returned to England, Delaporte still being with him; and, six months later, he came of age and succeeded to about twenty-five thousand pounds a year, when he immediately threw off all the restraint that had up to this period been imposed upon him by his family, and launched out into an extravagance which was simply shocking. The acquaintanceship between him and Delaporte had ripened into an intimacy which, so far as Winter was concerned, was little short of a mad infatuation. They occupied a suite of rooms in a very aristocratic West End hotel, and the young man set up a steam yacht in which he made frequent cruises; and it is needless to say Delaporte was always with him. In fact, they were inseparable, and the class of people who accompanied them were of a very shady kind; actresses of a certain rank being conspicuous by their number no less than by their lack of manners.

Lord Malvern did all that he could to wean his son from the evil influences which were having so pernicious an effect upon him; but unhappily without avail. Scenes of a very painful character took place between the father and son, but the more the young man was warned against Delaporte the more determined he became to keep up the connection. He seemed to be absolutely under the dominating influence and sway of Delaporte, and when anything was said against this man in young Winter's presence he became furious, and vowed that no power on earth should sever him from his "friend," as he termed him. It was really hardly a matter for surprise that

a weak-minded and spiritless youth like Winter should have been attracted to Delaporte, who without exception, was the most fascinating man I have ever known. I once heard him described as being "as polished as a rapier and as dangerous as its point." As a matter of fact, he was brilliant, handsome, witty, and clever; but as he had no income, with the exception of two or three hundred a year, which was his share of a small estate in which several others had an interest, it did not redound to his credit that, in spite of all the protests that were made, he continued to partake of the "hospitality" of young Winter year after year. He was a most extravagant man; dressed in the height of fashion, smoked the finest of cigars, kept his valet, drove a pair of five-hundred-guinea horses in the parks, had a private box at various theatres, was a member of swell clubs, dispensed princely entertainments to actresses, ladies of the ballet, and prominent music-hall stars, and was known generally as "a man about town." Of course this was not done on his paltry pittance; and though at this time neither his income nor the source from whence he derived it was known to Winter's friends, they were necessarily concerned, for they surmised that all this style and extravagance was kept up at Winter's expense. Driven at last almost to desperation, Lord Malvern sought my assistance, in the hope that some means might be found of saving his son from the consequences of the dangerous course he was pursuing.

It was the first time I had ever seen Lord Malvern. He was a handsome, stately, dignified man, with a strikingly patrician cast of countenance, a noble head, and faultless manner. He represented a very old and honourable family; but, as is well known, he



selected for his wife a fifth-rate actress, who had gained some renown by her dazzling beauty. It is no less generally known that the marriage did not prove a happy one, and for many years Lord Malvern and his wife had found it advisable to live apart.

As I looked at his lordship I was particularly impressed by his courtly bearing, as well as by the troubled and anxious expression that clouded his handsome face. Up to this point he was an utter stranger to me. I had heard his name, but there my knowledge ended. He did not take me wholly into his confidence at first; but, having introduced himself, he said—

“The object of my visit to you is a very delicate one. My youngest son, who is of full age and therefore beyond my legal control, has formed an acquaintance with a gentleman which I think, in the boy’s interest, is far from desirable. I make no charge against this gentleman at present, beyond saying that I believe he sponges upon my son; but I have received numerous anonymous letters which have warned me against him. As a man of honour, however, I dislike anonymous letters, and I have not allowed them to influence me, at least I think not. But the other day I received this communication, and I must confess it has impressed me as not one of the previous ones have done. It bears no date and no address, as you will see, and runs as follows:—

“‘If your lordship has any regard for the honour and reputation of your son, you will leave nothing undone to rescue him from the clutches and influence of the heartless and pitiless scoundrel who is leading him to absolute ruin and destruction. Be warned in

time. If you still love your misguided boy, and do not wish dishonour brought upon your proud name, keep him from Major Delaporte, who is one of the most refined and cruel men who have ever encumbered the earth. I do not give my name, for various reasons, but you may accept the assurance that I speak by the card, and I address you purely in the interest of your unfortunate boy, whom I desire to see saved from the snare which is being so artfully laid for him.'

"On receipt of this letter," his lordship continued, "I had an interview with my son. I am sorry to say it was a stormy interview. I did not tell him about the letter, but I said I had reason to believe Delaporte was not doing him any good, and that the major's reputation was not by any means spotless. My son got very angry at this, and defended Delaporte's honour vigorously; and he vowed that unless I could prove beyond all shadow of doubt that the major was not an honourable man, he should continue the acquaintance, and until I had justified my insinuation he would never hold intercourse with me again, but would brand me as a coward who had sought to asperse the character of one of the most honourable of gentlemen. Now, sir, you may imagine what my feelings are. I have very warm affection and strong regard for my misguided boy; but it seems to me utterly useless to attempt to reason with him. He is young and foolish; but also strong-willed, determined, and headstrong, and any attempt to coerce him would, I am sure, be worse than useless."

"Have you appealed to Major Delaporte?" I asked.

"Yes; but without avail. His answer was he was

greatly attached to his young friend, and as he was really watching over his interests, and meant him well, he saw no reason why he should sever the connection, simply because there was a prejudice against him on the part of my son's relations."

"Do you know anything of Delaporte's career?"

"No; nothing whatever. I can only surmise and conjecture. But I believe it is a fact he has no income of his own. I have, therefore, good grounds for my fears that he is keeping up his position and making a grand show at my boy's expense. But, apart from that, I object to the acquaintanceship. Delaporte is a libertine and a soulless man, and not at all a fit companion for an impressionable and wayward youth."

"Then what do you wish me to do, my lord?" I asked.

"Well, I understand that the major and my son contemplate an extended tour round the world. I should like to prevent it if possible, and if you can learn anything about the major's past which would have any influence in persuading my son to break the connection, I should be grateful. But, failing that, I should like you to follow them in their wanderings, and watch over Mr. Winter."

"Unknown to him, of course?" I suggested.

"Oh, certainly. The lad is most intolerant of interference. He says he has a right to do as he likes, and intends to do as he likes, and that he is quite competent to form a sound judgment as to his friends and acquaintances. Of course, youngsters just beginning their manhood's career have argued that way from time immemorial, and have lived to reap in a whirlwind of sorrow the seeds of the folly they sowed in their unfledged youth."

Necessarily I had to admit the soundness of his lordship's argument. But, as I pointed out to him, it was rather a large order for me to follow his son round the world, and it required some consideration. In the mean time, however, I promised to do what I could to learn something of the major's past career, and I took steps accordingly. A few days later I crossed the Channel to Paris, where I had no difficulty in discovering that Delaporte was fully entitled to style himself "major." His military career, however, had not been distinguished by any particular brilliancy. On the other hand, there was nothing against his good name, unless it was that he was regarded as a very extravagant man, and fond of keeping up a style which his means and position did not warrant. It was also hinted that he had had various little adventures with certain ladies, which probably he would prefer should be kept secret; but as adventures of this kind are looked upon very leniently in France, they were not considered to be of any importance so far as his honour and social standing were concerned. They were regarded only in the light of venial offences, and not to be taken into consideration in estimating a man's character.

I deemed it advisable to pursue my investigation a little further than this, because my mission was to prove, if possible, that the major was an adventurer, and a dishonourable man, as, in the event of that being established, the Honourable George Winter might be induced to sever what, under the best of circumstances, was an undesirable connection.

Delaporte, as I learnt, was a native of a village a few miles from Lyons. His father had been a merchant in Lyons, and had made a considerable fortune.

He had married an English lady, and purchased an old chateau near Lyons, where his family were born. Major Delaporte was one of six children, and at a comparatively early age he was sent to Paris to study, and later on was entered at the Military School of St. Cyr. He bore the character as a youth of being wild and reckless, and it was said that, owing to his extravagances, his father was much reduced in circumstances. When young Delaporte was about twenty, he returned to his native town to spend a holiday. And at this point I cannot do better than give, in his own words, a story that was told to me by the curé of the place, who had known Delaporte from the time of his birth.

"I am not going to make any accusations," he began; "I will simply tell you a plain, unvarnished tale. For many years there lived in this village a member of a very old and distinguished French family, the Comte de Fleury, who had been reduced to a state of almost absolute poverty during the last revolution. He was a widower, and lived here with his only daughter Elise, who was one of the sweetest and most beautiful girls that ever God's sun shone on. The comte, although poor, was proud and haughty, and his dream in life that his daughter might make a wealthy marriage so as to restore the fortunes of the family. Her beauty, goodness, and innocence certainly qualified her to be the mate of even the proudest noble in the land. For some time there had been some love-making between her and Delaporte; but the comte found it out, and was furious. He did not like the Delportes. He described them as vulgar bourgeois, and he seemed to be particularly prejudiced against young Delaporte, and he threatened

that, if he continued to keep up the communication with Elise, he would have him publicly horsewhipped. In the interests of peace and goodwill, I exercised my own offices to preserve amity between the two families. Not that I considered young Delaporte a desirable husband for Elise. On the contrary, I was convinced that he was too unstable, too unsteady for married life; and I was no less morally certain that Mademoiselle la Comtesse was too much of a saint to make a happy mating with such a sinner as this young man was."

"When you say he was a sinner, Monsieur le Curé," I asked, "what do I understand by that?"

"I mean that he was too fond of gaiety, of carnal pleasures; too fond of the world in general. Elise, on the other hand, was deeply pious. She found her delight in doing good deeds, and I always thought that, had it not been for her father's wishes that she should endeavour to retrieve the family fortunes by contracting a wealthy marriage, she would have taken the vows, for she inclined towards a religious life."

"But you knew of nothing against Delaporte's character at this time?" I asked.

"No, monsieur," answered the curé, with a thoughtful mien, and speaking with a certain reserve, which induced me to remark—

"You have some *arrière pensée*, Monsieur le Curé."

"No, monsieur; indeed, I have not. I speak with a perfectly open mind. I knew of nothing at this time against the young man that could have been formulated into a distinct charge of either immorality or any other cardinal sin. He was simply pursuing a course pursued by millions of young men the world over. Some people called him fast, others heartless.

They were vague terms, however, and might have implied little or much. He was proud, and his people were proud; and, according to my view, he was wanting in reverence, and was incapable of devotion. Well, when young Delaporte was about twenty, he came here to spend a holiday with his friends. He had been studying hard in order to pass certain examinations, and he was a little unstrung. At this time he was, I think, one of the handsomest youths I had ever seen, and, priest though I am, I venture to express an opinion that any young girl, in the slightest degree worldly, might have been forgiven for falling in love with him. About a fortnight after his return home, a sensation was caused throughout our little community by the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Mademoiselle la Comtesse Elise. Her father had occasion to go to a neighbouring town for a few days, and on his return he was horrified to learn that his daughter had left her home the night previous, and up to that hour had not returned. When he heard the news, the count almost went mad. Elise was the apple of his eye. Apart from his worldly views respecting her, which, after all, were very pardonable, he loved her with almost passionate adoration. Of course, the little place rose to the occasion. The count was much respected, and everybody showed him sympathy—everybody expressed a willingness to be of use if possible. Organized search and inquiry were at once set on foot, and everything that could be thought of was done to try and get a trace of the missing girl. Unhappily, however, all these efforts were fruitless. Neither tale nor tidings could be heard of mademoiselle. If any person knew when and how she had gone, that person was silent.

"And where was young Delaporte all this time?"

"Oh, he was here, and seemed bowed down with grief. He joined with the others in trying to discover her, and he did not leave the village until a month had elapsed from the time of mademoiselle's disappearance."

"And what of the count?"

"Ah, mon Dieu! It was terribly sad. His heart was broken, and his brain gave way. I reasoned with him; I ministered to him. I tried with all the powers of my holy office to soothe and console him; but when a man's heart is riven and his hopes wrecked, and his brain tortured till it cracks, it is difficult to bring him into that frame of mind when he can derive comfort and consolation from religion. At any rate, unhappily, it was so in the poor count's case. The wrench had been too dreadful, and in a moment of blank despair he ended his sufferings with a dose of poison.

As the curé told me this pathetic story, he was much touched, the tears welled into his sympathetic eyes, and crossing himself devoutly, he murmured with bowed head—

"God rest his soul!"

I waited until his emotion had somewhat subsided, and then I put this question to him—

"Monsieur le Curé, was young Delaporte suspected of having had a hand in mademoiselle's disappearance?"

"At first I think there was a tendency that way. Public opinion seemed against him. But his demeanour, his behaviour generally, and his manifest distress, changed the suspicion into sympathy."

"Is the fate of Elise known?"

"No. Years have passed. The grass has long



grown green on the old count's grave, and many of the then inhabitants of the village are sleeping their dreamless sleep now in the cemetery, including Delaporte's father and mother."

"Have you seen much of young Delaporte since?"

"No, monsieur. He passed into the army, and went on foreign service. For years we have lost sight of him."

"Now, Father," I said, "I am going to put a very blunt question to you. What was *your* opinion at the time the old count's daughter disappeared?"

The curé's face grew more thoughtful, and he passed his hand uneasily over his bald head.

"I would rather not answer that question," he said in a troubled way.

"Let me press it," I said.

"No, please do not," he replied, with a more pronounced expression of trouble in his face.

"But, Father," I urged, "since anything you may say cannot injure the dead, and may be to the interest of the living, I pray you, answer me."

Mistaking my reference to the dead, the good priest started, and exclaimed with deep emotion—

"Is La Comtesse dead?"

"Pardon me, Father. I am afraid I have not made myself clear. I know nothing whatever of mademoiselle. My reference was to her father and to Delaporte's parents."

"Ah!" sighed the curé, "I understand. And yet I would rather not speak my thoughts, lest I did any man an unwitting wrong, from which sin God keep me!"

I pressed my question. I pointed out that he might be rendering a great service, and if he had any

evidence, however circumstantial, that would tend to prove that young Delaporte had had a hand in the mysterious disappearance of the old count's daughter, it was his duty to Society, no less than to his conscience and his Church, to make it known.

He was greatly affected, and raising one hand solemnly, he said, in an emotional voice—

"I vow, in the name of the Most High, that I have not one tittle of evidence; but—and God forgive me if I do a wrong—I thought, and have always thought, and still think, Delaporte could have thrown some light on the girl's disappearance. He had cast a spell over her; he had fascinated her; she was infatuated with him; and reason as I would, I could suggest no cause that would have led her to break her old father's heart save the mad, blind passion of a misplaced love. But I repeat, I have no evidence. It is all conjecture. I have known nothing of Major Delaporte for years. He never comes to his native place. The family estate is a very small one, and there are several interests in it. Therefore, it seems obvious to me from the description you give of his style of living, that he must have other sources of income."

"That goes without saying," I replied. A man cannot live in the style that Major Delaporte is living in on nothing but three hundred a year, which, if I understand you rightly, is about all he has."

"Yes. I do not think he has more than that."

When I was about to take my leave of the old man, he seized my hand and exclaimed with great earnestness—

"Monsieur, you are a detective, you tell me, and you are trying to discover if Major Delaporte is an honest man. I have told you all I know of, and

have troubled my conscience by telling you what I *think* of him, because often our thoughts are apt to do injustice to our fellow-men. But, monsieur, in the interests of justice and truth, I should like you to try and solve the mystery of Mdlle. La Comtesse. Every effort was made at the time of her disappearance, but not a trace was discovered. At least if it was, it was never made known. It is probable that, as so long a time has now elapsed, we never shall know the truth; but I should like to—I should like to.”

I felt that I should like to do so also, for I was deeply interested in the case, and should have taken a delight in endeavouring to find a clue that would ultimately have enabled me to clear up the mystery of Elise's disappearance. But I received a telegram from Lord Malvern, asking me to hurry back to England, as my services were urgently needed there. On arrival, I found his lordship suffering from great distress of mind, as he had just learnt that his son and Delaporte had left England by the P. and O. steamer for a long tour abroad. They had taken their passage to Bombay. Lord Malvern was still of opinion that his foolish lad was being lured to destruction, and he begged of me to follow him and watch over him. It was a short notice, but I felt I had gone too deeply into the case to withdraw; and so, making hurried preparations, I started for Brindisi, having ascertained from the company that I could have a passage in the steamer. I had taken the precaution to so alter my appearance that I had no fear I should be identified by any one with whom I might come in contact. The *rôle* I assumed for the nonce was that of a commercial traveller, representing a large English firm with an East Indian connection. On joining the ship at

Brindisi which I only managed to do, as the saying is, by the skin of my teeth, I found that young Winter and his companion were travelling in great style. They had two of the finest state cabins on board, and each had his valet. This of course was very significant, knowing what I did of Delaporte, and it seemed now only too evident he was living on his dupe's income. From the moment that I fully and absolutely realized this, I determined to unmask the major when the fitting opportunity came. It will of course be clearly recognized that it was imperatively necessary I should have some definite charge to make against Delaporte if young Winter was to be influenced. To merely tell the youth that the major was sponging on him would have been utterly useless. He had already been told that by his father without avail; and since he was so blind to what was an obvious fact, it would have been a mere waste of time to try and open his eyes. My only hope of succeeding lay in the probability or possibility of being able to show by some means or other that Major Delaporte was not the honourable man he represented himself to be. As Lord Malvern had pointed out, that was the only thing which would be likely to sever the connection; for young Winter, whatever his faults were, had a very high regard for honour; and if it could be made clear to him that his confidence had been misplaced and his generosity abused, he would in all likelihood revolt against his companion and despatch him about his business.

I have already stated that the major was a singularly fascinating man. Not only was he physically attractive, but his manner and behaviour left nothing to be desired. If his heart was really black, never did man conceal a black heart under such a polished and

amiable exterior. To ladies he was the pink of politeness and chivalry, and consequently was a great favourite with them, and I soon determined that more than one on board would have sold her soul to him had he made a bid for it. To the gentlemen he was courteous and polite, consequently he became a general favourite and was in great request for anything that was going on. He took a leading part in all the entertainments, and he was constantly trying to devise something or other that would add to the pleasure of his fellow-travellers. Of young Winter I formed but a poor opinion. To use a common, but expressive phrase, he had no backbone. He was handsome and vain; and it was pretty evident he believed himself to be the cynosure of all the female eyes, and that every woman on board was in love with him. One thing I was absolutely certain of was that he was as plastic as potter's clay in the hands of his companion.

Amongst the passengers on board were a Mr. George Rendall and his daughter, a tall, handsome, but delicate-looking girl. It soon became known that Rendall was a lawyer, practising in Bombay. He had been home on a twelve-months' holiday, and his two sons were conducting his business in his absence. He was a widower. His daughter was twenty-two, and had been to England for the first time in sixteen years, as she was only six years old when she accompanied her parents to India. Her name was Muriel, and though she was reserved and shy, she was attractive, with a very feminine winsomeness that made her a favourite. I soon noted that a close intimacy sprang up between Major Delaporte and Rendall, the lawyer, and it became apparent

a little later that the major was amusing himself with Muriel. It seemed to me that Rendall was much impressed with the major and the Honourable George Winter. He regarded them, no doubt, as wealthy and much-favoured young men, moving in high social spheres, and probably felt that it was an honour to know them. At any rate, he was always very deferential, and he seemed particularly pleased whenever either or both of the young men invited him to a game at cards, or to take wine with them in their cabin.

All this had a special interest for me, as I was perfectly sure the major was not making friends with Rendall for nothing. Nor did I consider that it was altogether on Muriel's account, notwithstanding that it soon became a subject of common talk that the major and Miss Rendall were spooning; but I was sure that Major Delaporte was hardly likely to seriously entangle himself with the daughter of an obscure solicitor. No, there was deeper design and motive in his actions than that, and I watched him closely. The result was, I became aware, by certain little details, that Rendall was engaged in drawing up a will for young Winter, and then a new light broke upon me.

In due course we arrived in Bombay, after a pleasant passage, and there the major discharged his valet, for having been intoxicated on various occasions during the passage out. I may mention that I had appeared on board as a grave, sedate personage, with iron grey hair, and grey moustache and beard, and without holding myself altogether aloof from my fellow-passengers, I showed an inclination to be alone, and to pass my time in reading. But I watched narrowly,

and saw much. The grey wig, the moustache and beard had been specially made for me by a celebrated French costumier; they were so natural in appearance and fitted so admirably that the most critical scrutiny would have failed to detect that nature had not provided them. The reason for my thus concealing my identity will, of course, be perfectly obvious. I had a delicate and trying duty to perform, and I was dealing with no ordinary man. Before reaching Bombay I had decided in my own mind that Delaporte was one of the most subtle and dangerous rascals I had ever had to contend with. He was clever, ingenious, and heartless, and capable of a refinement of cruelty which almost made one shudder to think of. I studied the man, and read him more or less correctly, and I filled in the broad outlines of his character as I have given them. To checkmate such a man the most cautious and careful play was required. He had to be dealt with skilfully until the moment when circumstances might give one the victory. My disguise, reserve, and unobtrusiveness were therefore necessary aids to my ultimate success if I was to succeed in proving that Major Delaporte was a villain, of which I entertained no shadow of doubt. On the other hand, young Winter was an artless unsuspecting youth, who could be played upon and deceived as easily as a child, while his blind faith in and stupid admiration for the major made him an easy victim, and I saw that he was being led like a lamb to the slaughter.

No sooner did I arrive in Bombay than I changed my whole appearance. The grey wig, beard, and moustache were discarded, and when, a day later, I presented myself at Mr. Rendall's office, no one would

have dreamed that I was the same individual who had landed a little while ago from the P' & O. steamer.

As Mr. Rendall, after his long absence, was much occupied, I had some difficulty in getting to see him, and it was only when I represented that my business was of a very urgent character indeed that he consented to give me a "quarter of an hour." Of course, he had no idea who I was, nor that I had been his fellow-passenger from Europe. In his business character I found he was a little pompous, somewhat self-inflated man, with a tendency to an arrogance that was not pleasant.

"I have come here, sir," I began, "not only in your own interests, but in the interests of others, notably the Honourable George Winter——"

"Oh yes, the son of Lord Malvern," put in Rendall, with a smile of self-conceit, as though he thought it a distinguished honour and privilege to be on terms of intimacy with the son of Lord Malvern.

"That is so," I said, "and he is travelling with a Major Delaporte."

"That is true," answered Rendall. "Major Delaporte is a very distinguished man, I understand, and a great friend of Lord Malvern's family."

"Did he tell you that?"

"Well—yes, that is, he has led me to believe so. But before allowing myself to be questioned, I must know who you are, and what your object is?"

"You shall know both," I said. "My name is Donovan. I am a fairly well known detective. I am here under special instructions from Lord Malvern, and my object is to save his foolish son, if possible, from the machinations of a villain."

The sudden change that my words produced in Mr.



Rendall was remarkable, and even ludicrous. His air of smug conceit and self-consciousness gave place to a look of blank amazement. The colour fled from his face, his eyes opened to their fullest extent, his jaw dropped; he seemed to be absolutely "flabbergasted." When he had somewhat recovered from the shock, he stammered out—

"You—you don't allude to Major Delaporte?"

"That is the man I do allude to, sir?"

"Oh, nonsense, humbug! It's—it's a vile and unjustifiable insinuation. Major Delaporte is a gentleman; a man of unsullied honour. He—he has given me proof of it."

Mr. Rendall had got a little excited, as men do when they try to make themselves believe that they have not been deceived; and he looked at me half-appealingly, half-angrily. He did not like to think he had been duped. No man does. It wounds his *amour propre* more than anything else.

"Do you consider the proof lies in the flirtation he has carried on with your daughter?" I asked.

"Sir, what do you mean!" cried Rendall, indignantly, and trying to look very severe.

"My meaning, I think, is plain," I answered. "Delaporte has flirted with Miss Rendall during the outward passage from England——"

"It's false!" ejaculated the confused solicitor. "My daughter is betrothed to him. He has proposed to her."

"And been accepted?"

"Yes."

"And you approve of him as a prospective son-in-law?"

"I do, most certainly."

"Then he is a greater rascal than I thought, and you are unusually simple for a man of the law," was my reply.

Poor Mr. Rendall looked so distressed that I really felt sorry for him. It was only too evident that I had rudely dispelled a pleasant little dream he had been indulging in, and he had no doubt congratulated himself on the prospect of making such a capital match for his daughter. But my duty had to be done, however unpleasant it might be for others. Of course there was every excuse to be made for Rendall. Delaporte was such a plausible, smooth, exteriored rascal, that he would have deceived a far keener man than Rendall was; and then, as a passport and credential, he was travelling as the companion and equal of the son of Lord Malvern. These were so many points in his favour, and such an unscrupulous and polished villain knew how to use them to his advantage.

"Well, I—I confess you take my breath away," Rendall gasped.

"I have now a very important question to put to you. I am sure you will recognize its importance and will not hesitate to give me the information I seek. Is it true that you have made Mr. Winter's will?"

"It is true."

"Is it also true that that will is in favour of Delaporte?"

"That is also correct," answered Rendall, looking, if possible, more and more distressed.

"Is Delaporte the only person who benefits under the will?"

"He is. I have answered you frankly because it

seems to me there should be no concealment; for Delaporte is either a wronged man or a scoundrel. If the latter, it behoves you to prove it."

"Now, Mr. Rendall," I went on, "I can well understand that, up to this point, you have been unwilling to believe that you have been deceived and befooled; but you may feel thankful that you have discovered your danger before much mischief has been done as far as you are concerned; and I hope you will co-operate with me in endeavouring to bring Delaporte to book, and to save young Winter from the results of his folly."

"I am appalled," Mr. Rendall groaned, "and my poor girl will be broken-hearted. But perhaps, after all, your suspicions are unfounded. You may be mistaken. Indeed, I think you are."

"I am aware, of course, that there the father speaks and not the lawyer," I answered. "But take it from me, sir, that I am not mistaken; it is better for you to look the stern facts in the face. I am not likely to make such an error as to accuse Delaporte of being a scoundrel unless I have warrant. Believe me, I am right."

"Yes, I begin to fear you are right. I feel you are right," he murmured. Then suddenly his whole tone and manner changed. He did not seem like the same man. The affectionate and anxious father had given place to the hard, stern lawyer. "I recognize, Mr. Donovan," he continued, "that this is a terribly serious business, and that unless you had full justification for the course you are pursuing, you would not have acted in the way you have done. I have been deceived by Major Delaporte. But he would have deceived any one. I thought him a

gentleman of the highest standing. He gave me to understand that he was; and he has acted as such, and knowing, as I do, that the Hon. George Winter is a son of Lord Malvern, I never suspected that anything was wrong. Delaporte became very friendly with me on the passage out. Then he made love to my daughter, and finally he got me to draw up a will for Winter. He said that he and his friend had determined to travel extensively through India, and, if possible, penetrate into Thibet. As certain risks had necessarily to be run, Winter was anxious to secure his property in the event of his death, and he had expressed a wish to make Delaporte his sole legatee. In a subsequent conversation I had with Winter, he corroborated this; and said he desired that, in the event of his death, all his wealth, which, as I gather, is very considerable, should pass to his dear friend, Major Delaporte. Acting, therefore, upon his instructions, I drew up his will in conformity with his wishes."

"Has the will been executed yet?"

"No, not yet. It is to be signed and attested to-morrow."

I discussed with Rendall whether it was advisable or not to have the will executed, and he was of opinion that as I intended to closely shadow Delaporte, the will should be executed, otherwise Delaporte's suspicions might be aroused, and we should find ourselves foiled just when it seemed as if we were likely to triumph. I had to admit that there was some soundness in his argument. Delaporte was no ordinary man. He was clever, sharp, and watchful; and in order that he might be effectually trapped, it was important that he should be lured on in fancied

security. Now that Rendall had got over his disappointment, his sense of wounded pride displayed itself in a certain bitterness of feeling, and he betrayed his desire for vengeance. I therefore proposed a plan to him, which, after some little argument, I got him to assent to. I suggested that he should recommend me to Delaporte as a valet. I saw the difficulties that lay in the way of a stranger, following him into the wild countries he was going to; but in the character of his servant, I could shadow him most effectually, and afford greater protection to young Winter.

This matter and various other details being arranged, I presented myself on the following day at Delaporte's hotel. I was the bearer of the following letter from Rendall.

"MY DEAR DELAPORTE,

"As you are in want of a servant, I send the bearer, William Fletcher, to you. He is thoroughly trustworthy, silent, reserved, and watchful. He has recently come out from England. He speaks French fluently, and is willing to accompany you anywhere. I hope you will secure him.

"Yours faithfully,

"GEORGE RENDALL."

Mr. Rendall would not go beyond this. He left the rest for me to do. The letter procured me an interview at once with Delaporte; who, probably thinking that Rendall's letter was all that was necessary, asked me but very few questions, the conversation being carried on in French.

"I want a man," he said, "who will almost anticipate

my very thoughts. Who will be watchful and silent, two qualities which Mr. Rendall says you possess. We shall see. I engage you subject to my having the right to discharge you at any moment and anywhere, by paying you three months' wages."

I told him that I agreed with the condition, and he there and then engaged me. Subsequently I had several interviews with Mr. Rendall. I learnt that the will had been duly executed, and deposited with the Bombay branch of the Agra and Masterman Bank, where Winter had also opened an account and obtained letters of credit. Rendall further informed me that he had not said anything to his daughter; but, in order to remove her from Delaporte's influence, he had sent her to some friends at Madras.

A fortnight later, the Hon. George Winter's party, in which I figured as a valet, left Bombay for Calcutta. We spent three weeks in Calcutta, and during this time I had ample opportunity of studying Delaporte and Winter, and the opinion I had previously formed of each was more than confirmed.

The Major was a deadly, clever, cunning, unscrupulous villain, rendered all the more dangerous by reason of his plausibility, his polish, and his fascination. Winter, to put it bluntly, was a young fool. He hated trouble or exertion of any kind. He was a pampered sybarite, whose every whim and fancy, however outrageous, must be satisfied. He spent his money with a lavishness that was pitiable. Indeed he seemed to have no knowledge of the value of money. Delaporte was the cash-keeper. He paid the accounts, he looked after everything. All the arrangements for the journey were left to him. He drew up the programme; he fixed the route. One

day, just before leaving Calcutta, he paid me the compliment of saying—

“Fletcher, I am very satisfied with you. You seem an excellent servant. You ask no questions; you don’t annoy me with tattle. If you continue as you have begun, you will find that you did a good thing for yourself when you entered my service. But, mark you this, Fletcher, I want you to recognize that I am your employer, therefore you must make my interests, my comfort, your constant study. In short, to put it frankly, I expect from you the same faithfulness a master expects from a well-trained dog.”

As an answer to this I merely bowed. He spoke flippantly and with a certain jauntiness; but I was convinced he had a concealed meaning in his words, while in his dark eyes was, as it seemed to me, a sinister light which revealed the evil thoughts of his brain. Winter’s valet was a young Englishman named Charles Budd. He was an all round good servant, I believe, who knew his duties and did them well; but intellectually I considered him dull and frivolous.

We went from Calcutta to Darjeeling, where we spent a fortnight. From there we proceeded west to Benares, where another fortnight was spent, and after that we went on to Allahabad. During all this time I was aware that Delaporte was corresponding with Muriel Rendall, and receiving letters from her. I frequently posted his letters to her, and I knew her handwriting because her father had given me a specimen of it. From Allahabad we visited Cawnpore and Lucknow, and from the latter place moved on to Delhi. Then we travelled by easy stages into the Punjaub, and brought up at Peshawar. At this place

Delaporte made arrangements for continuing the journey through the Kyber Pass and on to Cabool. Tents were provided, an escort engaged, a large stock of provisions laid in, and the services of numerous bearers and carriers were secured. Amongst the many persons engaged was an Eurasian doctor—a young man under thirty, who had been for some time in England, where he had studied medicine. He did not impress me, however, with either his talents or his learning. In fact, he seemed to me dull and even stupid. But I came to the conclusion that those very qualities were his recommendations to Delaporte, who engaged him. The major did not want a clever man, unless all my theorizing was wrong; he wanted a tool, and in this Eurasian doctor he was likely to find one, for the fellow from the first seemed to be profoundly impressed with the major's greatness and importance.

For several weeks young Winter had, on and off, suffered from strange attacks of languor and weakness. He had sunk into a lethargic condition, and seemingly had lost interest in everything. The doctor examined him and prescribed. He said he was suffering from the effects of the climate; that his illness was nothing serious, and as soon as we got into the bracing air of the Kyber he would recover his wonted health and spirits. I had my own opinions. Few things escaped my observation, and I learnt much. Delaporte was by no means a particularly cautious man. A man who was playing the game of life on the lines he was following should not have been guilty of acts of carelessness that were calculated to give his opponents points. But the fact is, I had so far won his confidence, that he did things in my presence, and displayed more carelessness than he otherwise might



have done. Thus, many of his open letters were left for me to pack up or destroy, according to his orders, and certain note-books also passed through my hands. The result of all this was that by the time we had reached Peshawar I was in possession of a startling secret of his life. Had he known that I knew it, I have no doubt in my own mind that he would there and then, or at a later period, have had me assassinated, or shot me himself. But I was ever cautious, ever on the alert, being fully aware then that I had to deal with a devil in human form.

During our travels I kept up a correspondence with Mr. Rendall, and let him know that his daughter was writing to Delaporte. He subsequently informed me that he had taken her to task; had told her that he had come to the conclusion, from inquiries he had made, that the major was not calculated to make her a suitable husband, and that therefore she must give him up. But she declared that she would not and could not do so. She said her father was stupidly prejudiced, and that the major was one of the grandest men who had ever walked the earth. This determined her father to allow her to take her own course, as far as the correspondence was concerned, for a time at least; though he warned her that some day she might have a sudden and bitter awakening from her dream.

We lingered in Peshawar longer than had been arranged. Young Winter rallied, got ill again, then rallied once more; and at last one glorious morning we set off, a pretty big caravan, and proceeded into the sternly grand Pass. Our progression was slow. We had no need to hurry. Indeed I was sure that, unless I was woefully in error, Major Delaporte had

no intention of proceeding to Cabool. The drama was to be played out in the Pass.

On the second day of our journey we overtook a large trading caravan, and joined our forces. Our party were all armed with modern weapons, and the traders were glad of our company; for the hill tribes had been very active for some time, and a few months previously had attacked and almost destroyed a caravan coming into India, carrying off property amounting to nearly two lakhs of rupees.

When we had been out four days the Hon. George Winter again fell ill, and this time showed alarming symptoms. The services of the doctor were again in demand, but he treated the young man as he had treated him before, and said it was nothing serious. I ventured to question the doctor myself when an opportunity offered. I asked him if he did not think the young gentleman was very delicate.

"Oh yes, he is delicate," he answered. "He has very much weakness of the heart. But his heart will get stronger. He will be better by-and-by."

"Do you really think so, doctor?" I remarked.

"Oh, indeed, I am quite sure of it."

"Has he no other disease?"

"No, no; none, none," exclaimed the Eurasian medico with a toss of his head, as though the subject wasn't worth further discussion. But I was not disposed to let him off like that. I had a very important object to serve, though I was under some disadvantage in my character of a servant, as the self-opinionated young man, regarding me as a menial, showed an inclination to treat me with haughty disdain.

"You will excuse me, doctor," I said deferentially,

"if I trouble you; but Mr. Winter has been getting ill for some time, and I remember once seeing a young gentleman suffer just as he is doing, and, to the surprise of all his friends, he died quite suddenly."

"Well, of course, you fool, there is that possibility when a man has a very weak heart, like Mr. Winter," answered the Eurasian, peevishly, and with some warmth, as though he resented my interference.

"I am sorry you think me a fool," I responded meekly; "but I inferred from what you said at first that Mr. Winter is not in any danger."

"So I did."

"And you really do not think that he is?"

"I certainly do not think so."

"Then if anything should happen to him suddenly, as in the case I instance, you would ascribe his death to heart disease?"

The doctor looked at me angrily. He wore spectacles, and behind his glasses I saw his black eyes glittering like an aroused snake's. He evidently did not like my questioning, and he considered me guilty of presumption and a liberty. And yet, it is just possible something in my manner, or the expression of my face, or maybe a sense of his own ignorance and unimportance, restrained him from giving vent to his feelings, as far as he possibly could restrain himself. Nevertheless, he answered me sharply.

"I talk not these matters with a servant. You must keep your place. I have much knowledge of my profession. You are an ignorant man. How can I talk to you about what you do not understand?"

I bowed lowly, and replied—

"You are quite right, doctor. I do not understand *you*; but still I am glad I have said something to you

about Lord Malvern's son. He is a nice gentleman, and I should be so sorry if he died here in this Pass."

My friend was too thick-headed to see my point; and he did not condescend to hold further converse with me, but went his way. Had he known the contempt I had for him he would probably not have been so self-conceited.

The following day we made another very short stage, and encamped early, for there were signs of a storm. We were now in the wildest and most romantic part of the Pass. Enormous and precipitous mountains closed us in, and a roaring torrent swept with impetuous fury over a boulder-strewn bed. It was here that the wild hillmen often rushed down from their eeries, and fell upon passing travellers, and so, in selecting our camping ground, every precaution was taken, and when darkness closed in, outposts and sentries were duly placed.

It chanced to be an unusually dark night; even the stars were hidden by the great masses of drifting clouds. Above the wind moaned dismally; below the torrent thundered. It was a weird situation; a sense of unknown danger that did actually, or might threaten, kept the nerves of the native travellers at least in a state of tension; while the animals—the camels, horses, mules—were restless and uneasy from the atmospheric conditions. For myself, I was too intent in playing my game of checkmate to be able to take much note of anything else. The stake was a valuable one. It was a life; a valuable life. to wit, the life of the Honourable George Winter. I had watched and I had waited. My watching had placed me in possession of certain facts, and I knew that a crisis was at hand.

In that out-of-the-way and wild spot Major Delaporte was about to play his last and, as he thought, trump card. He had, according to his own views, no doubt, taken the most elaborate means to guard against failure. If he reflected at all on that fateful night, he probably thought that his scheme for self-aggrandizement and self-enrichment was as near perfection as human schemes may go. Opportunity and circumstances had all worked in his favour, and there seemed to be nothing to prevent the grand coup that would enable him to take the stakes for which he had played so skilful and desperate a game. And in that hour of his supposed triumph no voice whispered to him—

“That the best laid schemes o’ mice and men  
Gang aft a-gley.”

He and Winter occupied a large, square, and luxurious tent, which was pitched almost in the centre of the camp, but comparatively isolated, as a very considerable space was maintained between the “Burra sahib’s” tent and the others. Charles Budd and I, however, occupied a small tent just in the rear of the big one, the two being connected by a canvas passage. At any moment we could be summoned by a bell hung in our tent, and connected by a wire with Delaporte’s bed. The Eurasian doctor was housed about forty yards off. He was also in touch with the “Lords and Masters” by wire and bell. All the other tents were pitched in a circle around us, the animals being confined nearly in the centre. The escort were on the outer fringe of the circle.

I have said that this night was destined to be a fateful night. I had come to that conclusion by reason of many small things. Recognizing, as I

could not fail to do, that any error on my part might not only be fatal to myself, but to the interests I was endeavouring to serve, I deemed it advisable to take Charles Budd into my confidence to some extent. He was not a brilliant young man intellectually, nor was he by any means a fool; but he was neither quick-witted nor very observant. He had a strong vein of sentiment in his composition, however, and he often talked to me about his parents and his sweetheart in far-off England, and when he could get me to listen, he would read me yards of jingle, which he scribbled in his spare moments. He dignified it by the name of poetry, and had, I fancy, some sort of idea that Lord Byron never wrote better verse. I tolerated this harmless little foible, and put up with the oft-repeated praises of his "girl;" for he was a good fellow in his way. He had no viciousness, and his acts in life seemed to be guided by a sincere piety which he wisely refrained from obtruding on others. Of course, I had given him no hint up to this moment of my objects or ulterior motives, and he had no suspicion that I was acting a part. But the moment had come now when I deemed it discreet and advisable to enlist his co-operation in my plan, and as we sat and smoked in our tent on this particular night, previous to performing our final duties before retiring, I said to him—

"I say, Budd, what do you think is the matter with your governor?"

"Blest if I know."

"But have you formed no opinion?"

"No. He seems rather a delicate young fellow, and I suppose this trip's knocked him up."

"Well now, what do you think of my sahib?"

"Oh, he's all right. He seems a very nice sort of gent."

"You think he is."

"Yes, of course I do."

"He's very chummy with Mr. Winter; isn't he?"

"By Jove, yes."

"He takes great care of him."

"There's no mistake about that. That's why he engaged the doctor to look after him."

"Perhaps, after all, he only engaged the doctor so as to be able to throw dust in the eyes of the authorities, in the event of Mr. Winter's death," I remarked.

My words were not lost upon Budd. His face lighted up, and his eyes opened as he grasped the partially hidden meaning of the remark.

"What do you mean?" he asked, with a quickness which betrayed the dawning alarm he felt.

"Well, this is what I mean. I happen to know that the major has no money. The Hon. George Winter is rich. In Bombay is a will made by Winter, and left in the hands of a lawyer there. By that will, Delaporte would take all Winter's property if he dies. Do you follow me?"

"Yes?" gasped Budd, staring at me with eyes opened to their widest possible extent.

"Of course, in a wild place like this, a man might die and nobody would know what he died of. In this case, the doctor might say young Winter had died of heart disease, and the whole business would be settled. There would be no inquiry. The matter would end with the burial of the body, and Major Delaporte would become a rich man."

"Great God! do you mean to say that my governor is being murdered?" gasped Budd, in terror.

"I do mean to say so. I mean to say he is being slowly poisoned."

"By Delaporte?"

"Yes, by Delaporte."

I thought my companion would have fallen off the camp-stool he was sitting on, he was so surprised, so shocked. When he had recovered himself, he asked—

"How do you know this?"

"I guess it."

He broke into a smile, and exclaimed—

"I say, old man, this is going a bit too far, you know; ain't it?"

"I must go further still," I replied. "I want you to help me. I want you to watch with me to-night, and render me assistance if needed."

He seemed confused, perplexed, and troubled.

"You ought to be sure of your ground," he said, "or you may bring us both into trouble. Remember, we are only servants."

"I am sure of my ground; and though we are servants we are also Englishmen, and love fair play. Mr. Winter doesn't know his danger. He is entirely under the influence of Delaporte; therefore we ought to try and protect him."

Budd rose. He stretched out his hand to me.

"Give me your hand, old man," he said. "By Jove, if what you say is true, I'll stand by you through thick and thin."

"Good," I answered. "We'll talk about it again, by-and-by."

In a little while the bell rang, and both Budd and I went to the main tent to arrange things for the



night. Considering the place and the circumstances, the tent was luxuriously furnished. It contained two beds, tables, cushioned chairs, mirrors. The ground was covered with costly Persian rugs, a large swinging lamp was suspended from the centre of the roof.

I noted that Winter had already retired. I noted also that he looked ghastly pale and ill. Delaporte was reclining in a well-cushioned deck chair, reading a book and smoking a cigar. He rose as we entered, put down his book, stretched himself, and told me to get him some brandy and water. This I did, and having rendered other little services I retired in obedience to his orders, as he said he was going to turn in. He seemed outwardly as if he hadn't a care in the world; but beneath his smooth exterior he must have been troubled and anxious, callous and devilish though he was.

It will be admitted that I was in a somewhat delicate position; for in the wild country in which we were then encamped, everything apparently was in favour of Delaporte's nefarious designs succeeding. Our travelling companions were all natives of mixed races, and unless I had been able to furnish them with the most absolute proofs that my suspicions were justified, how could I hope to arouse their sympathy and interest. Then again, Delaporte, with a cunning artfulness that was little short of diabolical, had engaged the services of a doctor; but this man knew no more what his patient was suffering from, than he knew of the differential calculus, or the Letters of Junius. Moreover, he was so greatly impressed with his employer, that it would have been very difficult indeed to induce him to believe

in anything to his hurt or prejudice. It is true I had secured Budd's co-operation; but even our united efforts would not avail us much unless we were furnished with proof, which would admit of no doubt being thrown upon it. I have already stated that I had seen enough to justify my inference, that the *dénouement* of the thrilling drama was at hand. The wily Delaporte had planned the route, with a view to accomplishing his purpose with the least possible risk to himself; and with a refinement of ingenious cruelty, he had laid that route through the wild and romantic Kyber Pass, so that there should be very little chance of his dark deed being revealed to the light of day. Such, no doubt, were his views, and he had not made any calculation for the failure of his elaborate plan.

On leaving the tent, I told Budd that a crisis was at hand, and I also deemed it prudent, no less than my duty, to reveal my identity to him, and tell him why I was there. The information almost deprived him of his breath; but, when he recovered himself, he renewed his pledges that he would stand by me, and render every possible assistance. As every man in the caravan had to be well armed for his own personal protection, we each had a revolver, a rifle, and a formidable *couteau de chasse*, or hunting knife. Sticking our knives and revolvers in our belts, we took up a position which enabled us to watch Delaporte's tent, without being seen ourselves.

Silence fell upon the camp. But presently the threatened storm burst. The wind rose till it blew a gale, and many a tent was blown to the ground, and the animals becoming restless, neighed, whinnied, and groaned. Soon a cold, bitter rain fell in torrents,

and added to the discomfort of the camp. The Burra sahib's tent, however, was not affected. It was so secured that it would have required a cyclone to have carried it away, while the material it was composed of was quite waterproof, and a trench had been dug round outside, to carry off the drainage. Nevertheless, it swayed in the fierce blasts of wind, and the swinging lamp called into play strange and fantastic shadows that chased each other over the canvas walls. One of these shadow pictures, as seen from the outside, represented a man, now swelling to the proportions of a giant, now dwindling to a dwarf, as the lamp swayed to and fro. With one hand he grasped a bottle from a table; with the other he poured some liquid, from what seemed to be a phial, into the bottle, and replaced the bottle on the table.

I saw this from the outside and understood it. Near the head of the Hon. George Winter's bed was a small table on which stood his medicine and other things. Winter slept, and his treacherous companion stealthily approached, under the impression that no human eye witnessed the deed, and poured poison into his medicine. He had been gradually poisoning him for some time, but on this night of all nights he had resolved that the fatal dose should be given.

Budd also saw the picture I have described and he was horrified, and would probably have betrayed himself had I not kept him quiet. I waited for some time until I was aware that Delaporte had got into his bed, and had had time enough to fall asleep, if the cold-blooded rascal could sleep. Then I crept into the tent, while Budd crouched at the entrance, ready for any emergency. All was quiet inside. The lamp still swung backwards and forwards, and the canvas

walls shook in the wind. I reached the bedside of Winter, who was moving about uneasily, and grasping the bottle of poisoned medicine, I was about to withdraw, when Delaporte sprang up, and exclaimed—

“Hallo! what’s this? Here, who the deuce are you?”

I stood straight up, and with one quick movement seized his weapons which lay on a little table beside him. Then I called out to Budd and told him to ring up the doctor, and alarm our portion of the camp. By this time Delaporte was out of bed. He seemed confused, and had evidently lost his presence of mind.

“Who are you?” he bellowed again, for by the uncertain light he could not recognize me.

“I am your supposed servant,” I answered; “but in reality I am a detective who has long shadowed and watched you——”

“What is the meaning of this?” cried Winter, who had now been aroused and was sitting bolt upright.

“It means, sir,” I answered, “that this false friend and treacherous companion of yours has been slowly poisoning you. He intended, I believe, that this night should be your last. I hold in my hand your medicine, which I saw him tamper with, and pour something into from a small phial. You will understand now why he got you to make your will and leave it behind in Bombay.”

“My God! Delaporte,” exclaimed Winter, “this is an awful charge. Is it true?”

“It’s false; this lying scoundrel knows it’s false,” Delaporte hissed between his clenched teeth, and seemed meditating a spring upon me; but I kept him covered with my revolver.

"It's perfectly true, Mr. Winter," I answered, "and I will prove it to the hilt. I have shadowed this man by request of your father, Lord Malvern, ever since he left England. Having succeeded in getting you to make a will in his favour, his intention was to destroy you, but I have foiled him."

"By heavens! many things are now clear to me," cried Winter, as he jumped out of bed and seized his gun, "that were before obscure. Yes, Delaporte, I believe it. My eyes are opened. I have been a fool to be blind so long."

By this time the doctor had arrived on the scene, and there was general confusion. Delaporte stood almost like a statue, his arms folded, his brow knit. Having recovered from the first shock, he was now cool and collected.

"This is a pretty story," he said, "and I am amazed that an intelligent man like you, Winter, should believe it. This fellow is mad——"

"He doesn't seem very mad," interrupted Winter, "since he knows all about the will." Then, turning to the doctor, who looked dumfounded, he added angrily, "You are a doctor, and you were engaged to attend to me. Answer me truly, sir; are the symptoms I have shown compatible with the theory of poison?"

"It's—it's pos—sible, that poison might—might have produced them," stammered out the frightened Eurasian.

"You hear that," Winter exclaimed, still more angrily to Delaporte. "What have you got to say?"

"What I have already said. It is a damnable plot against me! It's false! It's a lie!"

"Who in the name of common sense would concoct a plot against you of this kind? No; on the very

face of it it is true, and I see you now in your true colours. You have sponged on me long enough. But the game is up now." Then turning to me, he asked, "What is to be done?"

"You are financing this expedition," I answered, "therefore every one in connection with your camp is under your control. Give the escort orders to place Delaporte under arrest, and as soon as daylight comes let us strike camp and return to India."

"It shall be done," answered Winter, rising to the occasion, and showing more energy and determination than I had ever seen him display before. Delaporte smiled sardonically as he remarked—

"I am quite willing to accompany you back to India and to England. You can sustain no charge against me, and I assure you I am not the man to remain quiet under injustice. But don't inflict indignities upon me now. I give you my *parole d'honneur* that I will go back with you. But you must remember I am a gentleman, and I must demand that respect from your subordinates which is due to my rank and position."

"I will accept your word of honour," answered Winter; "but I shall deprive you of your weapons."

"As you will," said Delaporte, with a bitter smile, and looking crestfallen in the extreme. "And now that the business is settled dismiss these fellows, and let those who can sleep."

"I strongly advise you not to trust yourself alone with him," I remarked. "He is a desperate man, and may resort to desperate deeds."

Winter seemed at last to be fully alive to his danger, and he showed that he was not without resource and energy now that they were required. He gave orders

that two of the escort were to be stationed in the tent, and two immediately outside, and he asked me to remain with him.

Delaporte, as though the whole matter didn't concern him, threw himself on to his truckle bed, and rolled the blanket round him. But I was not deceived by this braggadocio and display of indifference. The fact is, he recognized how heavy the odds were against him, and that it would be madness to offer resistance.

In a little while the confusion had subsided, and once more silence reigned, save for the howling wind, which still blew in fitful squalls, sometimes with an energy which threatened to sweep all before it. Fortunately the rain had ceased, but the cold was very severe.

My companion Budd seemed to be much upset by what had taken place, and exhibited a certain amount of nervousness which necessitated my giving him considerable attention during the remainder of the night, and I was thus deprived of my much-needed rest. At length the morning dawned, and life and bustle began to show itself in the camp. As soon as breakfast had ended, the trading caravan began to get under weigh, while we also prepared for our return march. While the baggage animals were being packed, Winter asked me to stroll with him a little way, and he questioned me on what I knew with reference to Delaporte. As there was no longer any necessity for concealment, I told him everything, and when he fully realized the narrow escape he had had, he was furious against Delaporte, and declared that he would challenge him to a duel in the Pass, and fight him to the death. I reasoned with him, however, and dwelt warmly on the absurdity of such a course. Moreover, I

pointed out that he, as a man of honour and a gentleman, could not demean himself by fighting with such a dishonourable scoundrel as Delaporte. He saw it at last in this light, but his bitterness did not pass away. The revelation of the deceit that had been practised upon him, ruffled him in a way that surprised me, for I had deemed him incapable of any great display of spirit. As it was, I think very little more provocation would have been needed to spur him into inflicting summary chastisement on his quondam friend.

The bottle of medicine I had seized I most carefully sealed up and stowed away, and I drew up a hasty report of the whole affair, and got Winter, Budd, and the Eurasian doctor to sign it. And to guard against accident I suggested to Winter that it might be advisable for him to make a brief will, revoking all former wills. This he did, and Budd and I attested it.

By the time these little matters were settled we were ready to start. The other caravan had already moved off amidst cheers and counter cheers. Half an hour later we were under weigh. Delaporte affected to be in good spirits, but it was easy to see that he was troubled and anxious. Had I been permitted to have my own way I should have made him a close prisoner, for I had little faith in *his* word of honour. We were, however, outside the sphere of British influence, and, as Winter was financing the expedition, he was by right in command, and he showed at this juncture that he was not quite the nincompoop he had hitherto seemed. The excitement, too, had brought about renewed strength; his pale face had taken on a flush, and his eyes were brilliant.



We made a fair day's march, and pitched our camp for the night in a rugged defile, which, like our previous night's quarters, was overhung by frowning precipices. It was decided that Delaporte should have a tent to himself, and a small one was allotted to him, while two of the escort were ordered to guard him closely, and shoot him if he attempted to escape.

The night was fine and calm. There was no rain, no wind; the stars shone brilliantly. The air was cold and bracing. By Winter's request I took up my quarters in his tent, and, thoroughly worn out by the want of rest and sleep, I slept soundly the whole night. When I awoke in the morning I felt a strong current of cold air blowing upon me, and to my surprise, I noticed that there was a large slit in the canvas wall near my bed, and as I attempted to rise, I found that the clothes were pinned to the mattress by a hunting knife, which had been driven into the bed up to the hilt. This told its own tale. An attempt had been made upon my life! The canvas wall had been cut, an arm thrust through, and a tremendous blow aimed at my body. But the distance of the reach had been miscalculated; the knife had just missed me, and been driven into the bed. I describe the blow as a "tremendous" one, for great power had evidently been exerted, otherwise the knife would not have penetrated through clothes and mattress as it had done. But my would-be slayer had worked in the dark, and so had bungled. Naturally, my thoughts flew to Delaporte. He was the only one who had any interest in bringing about my death, and either he or some hireling assassin had endeavoured to give me my quietus. Jumping out of bed, I divested myself of my pyjamas, got into my travelling

clothes, and hastened to Delaport's tent, only to find however, that he was not there; and a search through the camp revealed the fact that the bird had flown. This "gentleman," who had given his *parole d'honneur*, had felt it prudent to clear out, having first of all endeavoured to secure my taking off. It was also made evident that he had corrupted his guard, because they too had gone, and he had succeeded in taking with him a portion of his luggage.

As soon as his flight was placed beyond doubt, I held a hurried consultation with Winter, and as it seemed probable that he would make his way into India, I set off in pursuit, with an escort of four well-armed men, all of us being mounted on fleet horses. For hours we rode at our animals' best pace, until we fell in with another trading caravan, bound for Cabool. We questioned the men closely, but they averred that nobody had passed them. It seemed, therefore, probable that the fugitives had continued their journey into Afghanistan, instead of returning to India. So we gave up the pursuit, and rode back slowly towards our companions.

Without further adventure we reached Peshawar, and there all inquiries failed to elicit any information about Delaporte, and there was no longer room to doubt he had gone north, and would rejoin the caravan we had travelled with. At Peshawar, Winter disbanded his camp-followers, disposed of his surplus stores and animals, and then set off to proceed to Delhi, whither I accompanied him. In the mean time I had despatched news of the result of my journey by telegraph to Mr. Rendall in Bombay. On arriving in Delhi I placed the bottle of medicine in competent hands for experiment and analysis, and it was

found to contain a potent Indian vegetable poison in sufficient quantity to produce death by paralyzing the heart. It acted directly upon the heart. Given in small doses, it gradually lowered the action of that organ, and set up all the symptoms of debilitated heart. It was a poison well known to the natives, and not unfrequently used for illegal purposes. The depths of Delaporte's wickedness were now fully made known. With cold-blooded deliberation he had planned out the whole scheme for the taking off of the stupid young fellow, over whom he had succeeded in gaining an ascendancy that would have been fatal, but for the circumstances which fortunately had enabled me to foil him at the very moment when it seemed as if his nefarious scheme was about to give him what he had plotted for. By Winter's request I continued with him as far as Bombay. There we learnt that Delaporte had written several letters to Miss Rendall, urging her to travel up country as far as Lucknow, where he would meet her and marry her. Fortunately, she had the good sense not to allow herself to be influenced by his persuasions, and so escaped falling into his clutches.

At Bombay I parted from Winter who had decided to remain in that city for some time. I travelled by the overland route, and at Alexandria I secured a passage in a French steamer, which was going direct to Marseilles. From Marseilles I made my way, without loss of time, to Avignon, for I was anxious to clear up another mystery in connection with Major Delaporte. At Avignon was an establishment kept by a man and his wife, named Artois. At this establishment I presented myself, and using Delaporte's name, I asked to be allowed to see a "Madame Duchesnal,"

and after considerable hesitation and beating about the bush on the part of Artois, and a not-to-be-denied persistency on my part, I was conducted to a large apartment which was divided by an iron grid, reaching from floor to ceiling. After waiting here for about half an hour, a door opened at the other end of the room, on the side of the grid opposite to that to which I was placed, and a young woman entered, accompanied by a powerful, bare-armed, sullen-looking virago, who carried a large bunch of keys at her waist. The young woman was Madame Duchesnal, at least, that was the name she was known by there; but in reality she was the long-missing Comtesse de Fleury. To some extent she still retained her good looks, but she was so thin that her bones seemed to be almost entirely fleshless. The expression on her face was vacant and dazed, and her eyes were dull and without light. I spoke to her; she took no notice of me, but swayed her body from side to side, and crooned out a sort of sobbing wordless melody. Her keeper seized her in a vice-like grip, and shook her brutally, exclaiming—

“Why don’t you answer the monsieur, you fool?”

Over the pale face of the unfortunate girl spread a look of concentrated horror and fear, and clasping her hands she turned to me, and moaned out these words—

“Je suis bien triste. Misericorde!—Misericorde!”

Unable to restrain my indignation, I told the brutal keeper that if she touched the poor sufferer in such a way again, she would do it at her peril, for I would have her dragged before the police. Then I ran to the door and bawled out for Artois. When that worthy

appeared, I related to him what I had witnessed. He simply shrugged his shoulders, and said coolly that Madame Duchesnal was a very refractory and stubborn patient, and her keeper was obliged to be severe and firm with her. I told him, in answer to this, that he was as big a brute as the woman was, and that I should immediately take steps to have "Madame Duchesnal" removed from his power.

I tried to get answers from the poor girl, to various questions I put to her; but it was only too painfully evident that some sense of deadly fear kept her silent. The fact was, she had been terrorized over to such an extent that she dare not say anything.

On leaving this precious establishment, which was euphemistically termed a "*Maison de Santé*," but which, in reality, was a private lunatic asylum, where the patients who were taken there, even if not mad on arrival, were soon made so—for it was to the interest of the wretches who presided over this infernal place to keep the inmates as long as they could, if payment was forthcoming; but if payment ceased——well, then, Heaven only knew what became of the unhappy people—I made my way to the chief of the police, and laid information against the house. It was impossible, of course, that he could have been in ignorance of the existence of such a place; but he expressed great surprise when I told him, and said he would have inquiries made.

My next step was to telegraph to the *curé* of Delaporte's native town, and ask him to come at once to Avignon. I followed my telegram with an explanatory letter, and four days later the grey-headed old priest had joined me. He wept with sorrow, and yet his sorrow was tempered with a certain joy, when

he learned that the hapless daughter of the Comte de Fleury was alive. Perhaps I need scarcely say that, without a moment's loss of time, the poor young woman was rescued from the power of the brutal Artois, whose establishment was ultimately broken up by the police. Mademoiselle Elise was taken to an hotel at Marseilles, and carefully nursed for a few days. She was in a terrible state, and seemed afraid of every one who came near her. But gradually, the old curé's kindness and sympathy won upon her, and wrought a change. Then she was taken back to her native town, where many of her people still lived. The reaction, after the tyranny she had been subjected to, produced a serious illness, and for some considerable time her life hung by a thread. Indeed, scarcely anybody thought she could survive. Gradually, however, she was won back to life and sanity, and by degrees her terrible story was told.

It appeared that Delaporte had prevailed upon her to leave her home, and, so completely had she fallen under his influence, she yielded to his passionate entreaties, although in doing so she knew that her father would not survive the blow. In a very short time her lover began to tire of her, and feeling her to be an encumbrance, he tried, clandestinely, to asphyxiate her with a brazier of charcoal. She managed to escape this, and was led to believe that she had been the victim of an accident. This was followed by a course of brutal treatment on the part of Delaporte, which maddened her. Ultimately, by certain specious arguments, he induced her to accompany him to Avignon, where he placed her under Artois' care, and then abandoned her to her fate, and there is little doubt she would ultimately have been

done to death when it was found that the money for her keep had stopped. Fortune, however, resolved that it should be otherwise. While I was playing my part as servant to Delaporte, I came across certain letters from Artois to his infamous employer. Through these letters ran a constant whine for more money on the plea that the patient was expensive.

I have already stated that Delaporte was very careless with his correspondence, and this fact revealed to me the wretched girl's retreat, and enabled me to rescue her and restore her to her friends, although, alas! she was but a wreck of her former self.

Of Delaporte nothing more was ever heard, although inquiries were made through channels which were likely to elicit information if there had been any to be gained. But the strong probabilities are he never succeeded in getting out of the Kyber Pass. The weapons alone, which he managed to carry off, were sufficient to have aroused the cupidity of the natives. If he had joined the caravan with which we travelled for some distance, suspicion would be aroused, for the news had spread before we parted that he had been placed under arrest; and being looked upon as an escaped prisoner he would be regarded as legitimate prey. On the other hand, he might have wandered amongst the mountains, with the sentries who went with him; in which case he and his companions would be almost certain to fall victims to the greed and love of bloodshed common to the hill tribes; or his escort themselves may have murdered him for what he was worth. The truth will probably never be known; but it is almost a moral certainty that he met a violent death within a short time of his flight, and no one will

say he did not deserve his fate, however terrible it may have been.

There is one more incident to chronicle in connection with this record, and it serves to round it off in a pleasant way, though it was a result which was due entirely to the strange circumstances I have related. For some time after his return to Bombay the Hon. George Winter was very ill. His constitution had been severely tried, and the reaction after the excitement and peril he had gone through, produced serious nervous prostration. During this illness the Rendalls were exceedingly kind to him, and Miss Rendall may be said to have nursed him. Anyway, her charms so far prevailed over him that he made love to her, and although, as I understand, Lord Malvern tried at first to prevent the match, he ultimately withdrew his opposition, and in the fulness of time Miss Rendall became Mrs. Winter. It turned out a happy marriage. She cured him of his youthful follies. He and his wife ultimately settled in London, and, as is well known, became conspicuous members of Society.

THE END.



## WHAT IS MORE TERRIBLE THAN REVOLUTION?

"As clouds of adversity gathered around, *Marie Antoinette* displayed a Patience and Courage in *Unparalleled Sufferings* such as few Saints and Martyrs have equalled. . . . The *Pure Ore* of her nature was but hidden under the cross of worldliness, and the scorching fire of suffering revealed one of the tenderest hearts, and one of the *Bravest Natures* that history records.

(Which will haunt, all who have studied that tremendous drama,  
"THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.")

"When one reflects that a century which considered itself enlightened, of the most refined civilization, ends with public acts of such barbarity, one begins to doubt of *Human Nature itself*, and fear that the brute which is always in *Human Nature*, has the ascendancy!"—GOWER.

THE UNSPEAKABLE GRANDEUR OF THE HUMAN HEART.

THE DRYING UP OF A SINGLE TEAR HAS MORE HONEST FAME THAN SHEDDING SEAS OF GORE!!!

What is Ten Thousand Times more Horrible than Revolution or War?

## OUTRAGED NATURE!

"O World! O men! what are we, and our best designs, that we must work by crime to punish crime, and slay, as if death had but this one gate?"—BYRON.

"What is Ten Thousand Times more Terrible than *Revolution* or War? Outraged Nature! She kills and kills, and is never tired of killing, till she has taught man the terrible lesson he is so slow to learn—that Nature is only conquered by obeying her. . . . Man has his courtesies in Revolution and War; he spares the *woman and child*. But Nature is fierce when she is offended; she spares neither *woman nor child*. She has no pity, for some awful but most good reason. She is not allowed to have any pity. Silently she strikes the sleeping child with as little remorse as she would strike the strong man with musket or the pickaxe in his hand. Oh! would to God that some man had the pictorial eloquence to put before the mothers of England the *mass of preventable suffering*, the mass of preventable agony of mind which exists in England year after year."—KINGSLEY.

MORAL.—Life is a Battle, not a Victory. Disobey ye who will, but ye who disobey must suffer.

## JEOPARDY OF LIFE, THE GREAT DANGER OF DELAY.

*You can change the trickling stream, but not the Raging Torrent.*

How important it is to have at hand some simple, effective, and palatable remedy, such as ENO'S "FRUIT SALT," to check disease at the onset!!! For this is the time. With very little trouble you can change the course of the trickling mountain stream, but not the rolling river. It will defy all your efforts. I cannot sufficiently impress this important information upon all householders, ship captains, or Europeans generally, who are visiting or residing in hot or foreign climates. Whenever a change is contemplated likely to disturb the condition of health, let ENO'S "FRUIT SALT" be your companion, for under any circumstances its use is beneficial, and never can do harm. When you feel out of sorts, restless, sleepless, yet unable to say why, frequently without warning you are seized with lassitude, disinclination for bodily or mental exertion, loss of appetite, sickness, pain in the forehead, dull aching of back and limbs, coldness of the surface, and often shivering, &c., then your whole body is out of order, the spirit of danger has been kindled, but you do not know where it may end; it is a real necessity to have a simple remedy at hand. The common idea is: "I will wait and see, perhaps I shall be better to-morrow," whereas had a supply of ENO'S "FRUIT SALT" been at hand, and use made of it at the onset, all calamitous results might have been avoided. What dashes to the earth so many hopes, breaks so many sweet alliances, blasts so many auspicious enterprises, as untimely Death?

"I used my 'FRUIT SALT' in my last severe attack of fever, and I have every reason to say I believe it saved my life."—J. C. ENO.

Small Pox, Scarlet Fever, Pyæmia, Erysipelas, Measles, Gangrene, and almost every mentionable disease.—"I have been a nurse for upwards of ten years, and in that time have nursed cases of scarlet fever, pyæmia, erysipelas, measles, gangrene, cancer, and almost every mentionable disease. During the whole time I have not been ill myself for a single day, and this I attribute in a great measure to the use of ENO'S 'FRUIT SALT,' which has kept my blood in a pure state. I recommend it to all my patients during convalescence. Its value as a means of health cannot be over-estimated.—April 21, 1894, A PROFESSIONAL NURSE.

CAUTION.—See the CAPSULE is marked "ENO'S FRUIT SALT." Without it you have been imposed on by a worthless imitation. Prepared only at ENO'S "FRUIT SALT" WORKS, LONDON, S.E., by J. C. ENO'S Patent.

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